

Seminar on

Towards Quality Education for All:

Issues and Challenges Beyond 86th Amendment

(7-8 October, 2004)

A Collection of Papers
(Draft -Not to be quoted)

Venue:

*India International Centre Conference Hall No.2
40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi - 110003*

Organized by:

Council for Social Development

53, Lodi Estate, New Delhi - 110003

csdind@del2.vsnl.net.in

www.csdindia.org

Tel: 011 - 2461 1700 2461 5383

Fax: 011 - 2461 6061



A 2004/ 2005

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Towards Quality Education for All – Issues and Challenges Beyond 86th Amendment

- Ravi Kumar¹

Concept Note for Seminar

International Provisions for the Right to Free and Compulsory Elementary Education

Education has been cited as one of the prime indicators of development as well as tool to develop the human and social capital. Consequently, there is tremendous concern to educate the vast mass of uneducated population. This concern is apparent in the UN documents as well as the Indian government's effort to achieve 'literacy' through a variety of programs. The Article 26 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights underscored everyone's right to education. "Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory". It defined aim of education as "directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms." At the same time it also made clear that "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children", linking the nature of education disseminated with the needs and context of the child².

The Principle 7 of The Declaration of the Rights of the Child stated that apart from the free and compulsory elementary education the child "shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgment, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society."³

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also recognizes, in its Article 13, the right of everyone to education, and maintains that "primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all" and "the development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued, an adequate fellowship system shall be established, and the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved." The liberty of parents and legal guardians is also emphasized with regard to the choice of schools for their children. Article 14 makes it mandatory for its signatories "to work out and adopt a detailed plan of action for the progressive implementation, within a reasonable number of years, to be fixed in the plan, of the principle of compulsory education free of charge for all" within a period of two years.⁴ India

¹ Associate Fellow, Council for Social Development, 53, Lodi Estate, New Delhi – 11003

²UN Declaration on Human Rights (Adopted by UN General Assembly Resolution 217A (III) of 10 December 1948). Text available on http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/un_dec_eng.htm

³ Declaration of the Rights of the Child Proclaimed by General Assembly resolution 1386(XIV) of 20 November 1959. Text available at the website of the Office of High Commissioner of Human Rights (UNCHR) <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/25.htm>

⁴ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 3 January 1976, in accordance with article 27. Text available at http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_cesr.htm

accessed to the covenant on 10th July 1979 but failed to take up the follow-up steps towards achieving the promises made in it.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in its Article 1 defines child as every human "below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier". Its Article 28 maintains that States shall "recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all; (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need." It also stressed on the need to check drop-out rates. Simultaneously, its Article 29 provides that education of the child shall be directed to "the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own." ⁵ India acceded to CRC on 11 January, 1993, and even after more than a decade it has not only failed to act upon it but has enacted amendments defining child in contravention of the CRC, most pernicious of which is the definition of the child under the Child Labor (Prohibition & Regulation) Act.

As a follow up of the first world Conference on Education at Jomtien, Thailand, in March 1990 the World Education Forum met in Dakar in April 2000 to reflect upon the status of educational achievements worldwide and chalk out strategies for the future. Before the Dakar meet, the Asia-Pacific Conference on EFA 2000 Assessment was organized, which prepared the *Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Education for All - Guiding Principles, Specific Goals and Targets for 2015*. It spelt out its priorities for quality based care and education "at all stages of life" for children. It highlighted the need for "child-centered, family-focused, community-based, holistic care and education of pre-school children" and sought to forge a "synergistic partnership among families, communities, civil society, NGOs and the government." ECCE programs should aim at promoting "the child's optimum physical, psycho-social, emotional, cognitive and linguistic development in ways that are culturally and socially relevant." The focus of educational agenda must be "good quality that focuses on the 'whole' person, including health, nutrition and cognitive and psycho-social development." The education must also "eliminate systemic gender disparities, where they persist, amongst girls and boys throughout the education system - in enrolment, achievement and completion; in teacher training and career development; in curriculum, and learning practices and learning processes. This requires better appreciation of the role of education as an instrument of women's equality and empowerment." The excluded groups of society must be focus of the education programs. Within this framework of education the "public perceptions of teachers

⁵The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989. It entered into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49. Text available on <http://www.unicef.org/crc/crc.htm>

and teaching must be enhanced; incentives to identify, attract and retain good teachers must be provided".⁶

The Changing discourse on education

The goals for universal elementary education have been reemphasized on numerous occasions as cited above. However, in the course of this reemphasis there has been a change in the way education has come to be problematized. The changes can be seen in words⁷ as well as aims. The Jomtien Conference, sponsored by World Bank, according to some educationists, laid the "groundwork for intervention by the international funding agencies in the national educational structures and processes of the developing nations."⁸ The changes in education discourse also had implications for the right to education agenda as formulated in the beginning by the United Nations, itself. UNESCO's World Education Report 2000 notes that "there has been a change in the world's perception of the right to education over the past few decades. Whereas the Universal Declaration of human Rights proclaims that 'Everyone has the right to education', that elementary and fundamental education shall be 'free' and that "elementary education shall be compulsory", the Declaration adopted by the World Conference on Education for All proclaims that 'Every person – child, youth and adult – shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.' The Universal Declaration of Human Rights does not mention 'learners' or 'learning needs', and the World Declaration on Education for All does not mention 'elementary', 'fundamental', 'free' or 'compulsory education'. The twin notions of 'elementary and fundamental education' have been overtaken by the notion of 'basic education', while at the same time there has been a shift of emphasis from 'education' to 'learning': from what society should supply, so to speak, i.e. education that is 'free', 'compulsory' and 'directed towards', to what members of society are said to demand ('educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning need')."⁹

The Framework of Education in India

In India, the debate on education has been continuing since Mahatma Gandhi put forward his concept of *nai talim*, linking education with work. His conception took into account the poverty and occupational structure of India and argued that education must not become a source of alienating people from their contexts and environment. Rabindranath Tagore, on the other hand, conceptualized an education which freed the mind instead of confining it within the four walls.

⁶ Asia and Pacific Regional Framework for Action: Education for All - Guiding Principles, Specific Goals and Targets for 2015 was adopted by the Asia-Pacific Conference on EFA 2000 at Bangkok, Thailand on 17-20 January, 2000. Text available at http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/wef_2000/regional_frameworks/frame_asia_pacific.shtml

⁷ The World Education Report 2000 of UNESCO argues that "words matter, for they are used to express principles."

⁸ Sadgopal, Anil. (2001). Political Economy of the Ninety Third Amendment Bill. *Mainstream*, December 22. This emphasis on external funding was further enforced by the Dakar Framework for Action, which committed itself to "increasing external finance for education, in particular basic education" among other aims. The Dakar Framework for Action Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments (2000) Adopted by the World Education Forum. Dakar, Senegal. April 26-28.

⁹ World Education Report 2000: The Right to Education: Towards Education for all Throughout Life (2000). UNESCO Publishing

The idea of educating every Indian within ten years from the day Indian Constitution came into force was embodied in the Article 45 of Directive Principles of State Policy. A non-justiciable article, it called upon the state to provide free and compulsory education for every child up to fourteen years of age. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968, framed on basis of the recommendations of the Kothari Education Commission (1964-66), accepted the need for Common School System (CSS), equitable education for all and the necessity to achieve the free and compulsory education as highlighted by the Article 45. It perceived education as instrumental in producing "young men and women of character and ability committed to national service and development." The first national curriculum framework, formulated in 1975, talked about the need to inculcate the sense of democracy and equality in the child through developing a relevant curriculum. The NPE 1986 considered education important for all round development – material and spiritual – of the individual, which would refine his/her "sensitivities and perceptions that contribute to national cohesion, a scientific temper and independence of mind and spirit – thus furthering the goals of socialism, secularism and democracy."

From Article 45 to 86th Amendment: Quality Education to Quantity Education?

Despite such emphasis on educating the population the Indian State failed to achieve the target set by the Article 45. Gradually, the recommendations of various committees and even the constitutional provisions started getting diluted as the notion of 'knowledge' and 'education' got transformed into 'literacy'. From the aim of striving for all round development of individuals in a congenial atmosphere, the governments started implementing programs which tried to educate a child in two years as opposed to five year schooling through different schemes. Similarly, instead of providing every child sufficient facilities in form of a well equipped school the state implemented District Primary Education Program, which focused on multi-grade teaching with low resources and under-trained para-teachers, in collaboration with World Bank. A study conducted by DPEP itself in 1999 belied the claim that para-teachers are more dependable than regular teachers. "The report says that low salary, combined with the contractual character of the job, has been the major source of discontent and lack of motivation among para-teachers."¹⁰

The statistical portrait of the country shows the dismal performance of education sector. The drop-out rates in Classes I-V is 45.01% (43.83% for Boys and 46.67% for Girls), in Classes I-VIII it is 61.10% (58.23% for Boys and 65.21% for Girls) and for the Classes I-X the figure is 72.93% (70% for Boys and 77.32% for Girls). 85.5 % of the population has primary school within a distance of 0.5 km from their habitation while only 56.91% of population has upper primary schools within a distance of 1.0 km from their habitation. There are 5.04 primary schools and only 2.75 schools per thousand population.¹¹

¹⁰ Kumar, Krishna, Priyam, Manish and Saxena, Sadhna. (2001) The trouble with para-teachers. *Frontline*, Volume 18 – Issue 22, Oct.27-Nov.09

¹¹ National Human Development Report 2001, (2002) Planning Commission, Government of India, March. The drop-out data is for 1992-93 and the school data is for 1997-98.

An analysis of the budget and statistics by a Delhi based NGO shows the stark reality of education in India. According to the 1991 Census, there are about 185 million children in the 6-14 years age group (1991 census). It is estimated that about 45 per cent of them (about 83 million) are out of school. For every 5 primary schools there is one middle school while for every 9 middle schools there is one high school. There are 40,000 primary schools in rural India with no teachers at all. 1.12 lakh schools in rural India have only one teacher even after it was decided in 1986 to convert every single teacher primary school into at least a two teacher school. Average student teacher ratio is 1:50 as against the recommended 1:30 for our country. In most advanced countries the ratio is 1:20. Of the total 5 lakh schools in rural areas, 17 per cent or 87,000 schools do not have all season buildings. 26,000 schools have no rooms at all and 1.21 lakh schools have only one room each. The recommended number of rooms as per Operation Blackboard scheme (1987-88) is a minimum of 2 rooms per school. 60 per cent of the rural primary schools (about 3 lakhs) do not even have the basic facilities like drinking water.¹²

Apart from the physical deficiencies of schools, social accessibility is also a problem which is generally not measured.¹³ The literacy rate among Dalits and the condition of the government schools, which is used maximum by them because of their economic status, shows the nature of discrimination that exists in our education system.

Following the recommendations of Saikia Committee, the government introduced the 83rd Constitutional Amendment Bill in Parliament in 1997 to make right to education from 6-14 years a fundamental right. The Supreme Court in its judgment in Unnikrishnan's case (1993) had already held that citizens of India have a fundamental right to education up to 14 years of age. Under pressure from international bodies and national civil society organizations, the Indian State, through the 93rd Amendment, made elementary education a fundamental right by inserting Article 21A, which says that "the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine." It also substituted Article 45 by the text that "the State shall endeavor to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years." Social activists claim that if State's attitude towards the earlier version of Article 45 is any indication, the new version would imply dilution of the children's right to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). The other opinion argues, citing the Unnikrishnan Judgment, that the new amendment would provide a basis for legal intervention, though it also implies that it has gone against the Supreme Court ruling for educating all till age of fourteen years. Skepticism towards the policy also increases because the amendment or the pending Bill does not clearly mention the nature of education to be provided or State's financial commitment to the sector, when its total expenditure (of centre and states combined) is a meager 3.1% of GDP in 2001-

¹² Union Budget Analysis from a Child Rights Perspective. HAQ: Centre for Child Rights. New Delhi It can be accessed at .

http://www.internationalbudget.org/cdrom/papers/analysis/children/HAQ_childrights.pdf

¹³ Nambisan, Geeta. (2002) Equity in Education? The Schooling of Dalit Children - in Shan, Ghanshyam (ed.) (2002). Dalits and the State. Concept Publishing Company. Delhi

02.¹⁴ According to the ministry of education, the percentage of education expenditure to GDP has been 4.02% in 2001-02 whereas the National Policy on Education, 1986 had put expenditure target on education at 6.0% of GDP¹⁵. Real spending in the social sector as a percentage of GDP has decreased for the last five years. Budget Estimate for social sector as percentage of GDP has ranged from 1.20% in 1996-97 to 1.08% in 2000-2001, whereas the Revised Estimate has been ranging between 1.07% in 1996-97 to 1.05% in 1999-2000. There has been no increase in per capita investment in the social sector.¹⁶

Given such state disposition, implementation of the Fundamental Right becomes extremely problematic and reflects on the sincerity and the commitment of the state to Right to Education. It has not only not implemented it sincerely, it has transformed the character of education deviating from the ideals. The recent programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS), Alternative and Innovative Education (AIE) etc. have implied a second grade teaching for the children of the poor, dalits, disabled and girl child. These are the sections deprived of education and who comprise a large chunk in the drop-out list or out-of school student lists.¹⁷ They are the most needy ones because of poor resource base.

These policies have seldom taken care of the issues of curriculum (its relevance and attraction for the child), teacher training and teaching pedagogy, leave aside the infrastructural requirements of schooling. The pending Free and Compulsory Education for Children Bill, 2004 (the revised draft)¹⁸ proposes to create parallel authorities at village, block, district and state level, when panchayati raj institutions and other such institutions already exist. If Supreme Court rulings are indication, such legal provisions are bound to be quashed. In any case, it legitimizes low quality education for the deprived children, through under-paid, under trained teachers and resource low schools. It suggests penalties for not sending children to school, without ascertaining the social, economic or even cultural or political reasons, which are responsible for withdrawal of children. Too much emphasis is on the local resource mobilization, which itself contradicts the fact that impoverishment is abound in many of the states.¹⁹ The Bill hardly provides space for an inclusive education and in fact runs counter to the *Persons with Disability Act, 1995*, in terms of years of education that a disabled should be provided. The Act stipulates that children till age of eighteen years of age should be given free

¹⁴ Chapter 10, Social Sectors available at www.indiabudget.nic.in/es2002_03/chapt2003/chap101.pdf

¹⁵ Para 11.4 of NPE, 1986 states "that the investment on education be gradually increased to reach a level of 6% of the National Income as early as possible. Since the actual level of investment has remained far short of that target, it is important that greater determination is shown now to find the funds for the programmes laid down in this policy. While actual requirements will be computed from time to time on the basis of monitoring and review, the outlay on education will be stepped up to ensure that during the 8th Five year Plan and onwards it will uniformly exceed 6% of the national income". Quoted here from the Ministry of Education website: <http://www.education.nic.in/htmlweb/natpol.htm#1>

¹⁶ Social Watch-India Report 2001. The data quoted here is from the Economic Survey 2000-2001. It can be accessed at: <http://www.cysd.org/Cepra/SWArchive/socialwatch.01.doc>

¹⁷ Wadhwa, Soma, (2004). *Pencil Erasure Outlook March 01 and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan Shows no Real Achievements*. The Times of India, August 23, 2002. There have been many other reports appearing in newspapers and magazines on the issue as well.

¹⁸ It is available at http://www.education.nic.in/htmlweb/ssa/free_complusory_edu_bill_2004.htm

¹⁹ The National Human Development Report 2001 calculates the Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (PCCE) in rural India at Rs 486.08 in 1999-2000 out of which 59.41% is spent on food items. PCCE in states like Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa is much below the national average. This is only one indicator of the poverty in India.

and compulsory education. It also refrains from making tangible commitments to the Early Childhood Care and Education. Many review studies have pointed out that even the SSA is not being implemented in the manner government had intended in its documents, especially with regard to participatory planning, community evaluation etc.²⁰ The SSA had “promised that every child will be in school by 1 January 2003. With 35 million to 70 million children out of school, that promise stands broken.”²¹ A recent probe by Outlook magazine in different parts of the country shows what the new programs aiming at educating everybody looks like – without infrastructure, absent teachers, under-trained teachers and disinterested children.²²

The Seminar

These developments in the sphere of education are taking place at a critical juncture when the structural adjustment programs and accelerated drive to globalization have resulted into reduced expenditure on social sector. The current educational scenario provides a great challenge – a challenge to educate the masses towards their holistic development and not just make them literate. The recent developments have clearly outlined how the government is trying to achieve a ‘target’ forgetting the significance of quality in the process.²³ On the other hand, the government has ‘violated’ NPE 1968 and 1986 on issue of Common School System. Instead we find a complex network of institutions emerging such as the formal schools (private as state run), informal centers (under aegis of different departments) and now the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. The formal schools have become ineffectual due to mismanagement and negligent attitude of the state.²⁴ In this complex web of institutions and the poor quality of education provided by state there is a constant marginalization of the deprived sections of society. At such a juncture there is an increasing need to reflect upon these issues, which constitute the core of development agenda. The new developments in the arena of education make this reflection furthermore imperative. The seminar, to be organized by Council for Social Development, will focus on the fundamental issues of education in our country. It will be an opportunity for the academicians, grassroots activists and people involved with policy formulation and implementation to reflect upon the issues and provide new insight on the theme. It will provide an input to the civil society organizations working in the area and is expected to provide relevant inputs to policy framers.

²⁰ Arun Mehta from NIEPA, New Delhi has done a review of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and has highlighted such lacunae in his article *Some Reflection on Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* posted on the website. <http://arunmehta.freeyellow.com/page165.html> Delhi.

²¹ Kaur, Sanjiv (2004) How should the State fund education? The Economic Times, February 24

²² Wardha, Soma, (2004) Pencil Erasure Outlook March 01

²³ Debroy Bibek, (2004). Education Shining The Indian Express, March 17

²⁴ A recent study by the Indian Express in the HRD Minister’s constituency itself reflected the pathetic condition of schools. Majumdar, Diptosh, (2004). The Educator’s Backyard. The Indian Express, March 21

The sessions for the two day conference will include:

- Session: 1:** *The Constitution, National Policies and the International Provisions: Evolving a Critique.*
- Session: 2:** *Dilution, Distortion and Diversion: A Post-Jointer Reflection on Education Policy*
- Session: 3:** *Education in Contemporary Times. Mapping the Trajectory of its Changing Character*
- Session: 4:** *Right to Education: Implications of Constitutional Amendments, Policy Issues and Response of the State.*
- Session: 5:** *Inclusive Education and Common School System: A Question of Equity, Social Justice and School Reforms*
- Session: 6:** *Exclusion, Inequality and Discrimination - Dalits and their Socio-Economic Context.*
- Session: 7:** *Exclusion, Inequality and Discrimination - The Girl Child, Gender Issues and Women Empowerment.*
- Session: 8:** *Educational Deprivation of the Marginalized – The Case of Muzhar Community in Bihar*
- Session: 9:** *What is to be done? - Education of Equitable Quality: Do we have any option other than the Common School System?*

The Seminar will be organized on 7-8 October, 2004. Invited papers will form the input to the seminar. These papers, drawn upon fresh research, will reflect latest research on the subject.

Dilution, Distortion and Diversion:

A Post-Jomtien Reflection on Education Policy

By
Professor Anil Sadgopal

Dilution, Distortion and Diversion: A Post-Jomtien Reflection on Education Policy*

ANIL SADGOPAL

Introduction

The following news item appeared on International Literacy Day, 2004.

"Facing a shortage of students, the Directorate of Education has decided to close down 53 government schools, many of which are in old Delhi. This is in addition to (the) 55 schools already closed We have seen a steady decline in enrollment in government schools."

- Hindustan Times, 8th September 2004

Instead of showing concern and taking steps to improve the functioning of the government school system, the authorities seemed to be celebrating. They declared,

"The closure of the schools helps the Directorate in two ways. Firstly, the teachers can be posted in schools having few teachers. Secondly, there is saving on annual expenditure of maintenance and repairs."

- Hindustan Times, 8th September 2004

The government schools in Delhi have almost 70% of the school-going children of the metropolis. Close all of them and the Directorate will be helped maximally. It will save its entire annual expenditure!

This is not the first time that India has witnessed such a phenomenon. In 1999-2000, 30 government schools in the city of Indore were closed down and their campuses, located on prime lands in the heart of the city, were either converted into police stations or handed over to private interests for developing commercial complexes. The District Collector, in his report to the Chief Minister, proudly called it a process of 'rationalisation'! No one cared to know as to where had all the children gone. All of them had joined the rapidly mushrooming low fee charging school shops in the neighbourhood of the erstwhile government schools.

Almost at the same time, the Ahmedabad city corporation closed down one of its primary schools and handed over its campus along with the buildings to a French-sponsored Society to provide education to the well-off sections of society on a 'French Pattern'! The poor people in the neighbourhood protested but no one cared.

Few would believe that the above events were not random happenings taking place due to some local aberrations or some inefficient education officers. These represented the outcome of a well-designed deliberate policy of allowing the government school system to gradually deteriorate until it is replaced by the fee-charging private schools. This is precisely what the global market forces, led by powerful international financial institutions and funding agencies, have been working for. This paper is aimed at analyzing and exposing this complex phenomenon so that it can be resisted by the people whose children are being denied education.

* Prepared for the seminar organized by the Council for Social Development, New Delhi, on 7-8 October 2004.

† This paper is an updated version of an earlier paper by this author (Sadgopal, 2003d).

Look at another happening.

On November 28, 2001, the Lok Sabha was debating 'The Constitution (Ninety-third Amendment) Bill, 2001', introduced by the Government of India purportedly to make education a Fundamental Right. As the debate progressed, about 40,000 people from different parts of India held a rally a few kilometers away in Ramlila Grounds to protest against the Bill. They were contending that the Bill violated the principle of equality enshrined in the Constitution and essentially amounted to snatching away the Fundamental Right to education that had become available to the people as a consequence of Supreme Court's historic Unnikrishnan Judgement (1993). They were demanding '*Sub ko Shiksha, Samaan Shiksha*' (Equality in Education for All). In effect, the rally was reminding the Government and all political parties of the commitment made *thrice* to the nation: first, through a Cabinet Resolution in 1968 in the form of a national policy and twice by the Parliament again through a national policy (i.e. in 1986 and 1992) to evolve the Common School System for all children as the National System of Education, as recommended by the Education Commission (1964-66). They also knew that the Bill would allow the State to withdraw from its Constitutional obligation under the original Article 45 of ensuring free and compulsory education for all children 'until they complete the age of fourteen years' by excluding the children below six years of age and by shifting, in measured steps, its obligation to the parents and the community in the name of making it their Fundamental Duty. The rally's demands basically reflected two major concerns that had by then begun to impact on the public discourse on education in India, especially due to what happened during the Nineties. These concerns were: (a) increasing abdication by the State of its Constitutional obligation towards elementary education (i.e. a minimum of *eight* years of education from Class I to VIII); and (b) steady dilution of policies and programmes relating to 'free education of *equitable* quality' for all children (Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha, 1995; Sadgopal, 1994, 2000, 2001d, 2002b, 2003a). Ignoring a nation-wide public protest, negating three significant amendment motions moved in Lok Sabha and turning a deaf ear to critical speeches by several MPs, the Bill was pushed through both Houses of the Parliament. Curiously, there was not a single dissenting vote in either House, despite articulation of severe criticism. The Bill was eventually signed by the President in December 2002. We shall return to this matter later.

In order to comprehend the roots of people's concerns, it is necessary to refer to two sets of critical policy-related documents: one national and the other international. First, the *National Policy on Education-1986* (henceforth referred to as NPE-1986) and its companion document called *Programme of Action-1986* (henceforth referred to as POA-1986), both approved by the Parliament in May 1986 and November 1986 respectively.¹ Both the NPE-1986 and POA-1986 were revised by the Parliament in 1992 and, as a result, are known as NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) and POA-1992 respectively. Second, the *World Declaration on Education for All* and its companion document called *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs* adopted by the 'World Conference on Education for All (EFA): Meeting Basic Learning Needs' held at Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990 (these documents are referred to as the Jomtien Declaration and Jomtien Framework respectively).

This paper will attempt to establish that the twin trends of gradual abdication of Constitutional obligation and steady dilution of policy relating to 'free education of *equitable quality*' that clearly emerged during the Nineties, as also reflected in the 93rd (now called 86th) Constitutional Amendment Bill, had its roots in the policy framework of NPE-1986 and the programme design of POA-1986 (as well as their revised counterparts of 1992). The policy framework will be probed with the aid of policy analysis tools. This will reveal that the policy was designed to basically promote exclusion of crores¹ of children from elementary education and introduce inequality by institutionalizing low-quality multiple tracks or parallel streams of education. It was this character of NPE-1986 that provided both the foundation and the necessary socio-political space to international funding agencies, including the World Bank, to exacerbate abdication, accelerate the pace of exclusion and further marginalise people's aspirations for a Common School System and genuine Neighbourhood Schools². We begin with NPE-1986.

Non-formal Education: Probing the Policy Framework

The National Policy on Education-1986 (i.e. NPE-1986) marked a watershed as it was the first policy-level acknowledgement since independence that elementary school education of *comparable quality* will *not* become available to all children of India in the 6-14 age group. The notion of education of *comparable quality* for all children, irrespective of their class, creed, caste, gender, linguistic or cultural background or physical/mental disability, was clearly implied in the Constitution. Such an implication is seen when the original Article 45 (i.e. free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years)³ of Part IV (Directive Principles of State Policy) is read in conjunction with Articles 14 (equality before law), Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them), Article 16 (equality of opportunity in public employment) and Article 21 (protection of life and personal liberty), the latter four Articles belonging to Part III (Fundamental Rights).⁴ The concept of equality in *educational opportunities and conditions of success* is further strengthened in Part IV of the Constitution by Article 38 (social order with justice and elimination of inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities), Article 39e,f (tender age of children is not abused; children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity; childhood is protected against exploitation) and Article 46 (promotion with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes). However, despite such unambiguous Constitutional provisions, the NPE-1986 stated:

"A large and systematic programme of non formal education will be launched for school drop-outs, for children from habitations without schools, *working children and girls who cannot attend whole-day schools.*" (NPE-1986, Section 5.8) [emphasis added]

It further resolved:

"This effort (i.e. '*ensuring children's retention at school?*') will be fully co-ordinated with the network of non-formal education. It shall be ensured that all children who attain the age of about 11 years by

¹crore = 10 million.

1990 will have had five years *schooling*, or its equivalent through the *non-formal stream*.” (NPE-1986, Section 5.12) [emphasis added]

As per Acharya Ramamurti Committee Report (GOI, 1990, Chapter 6: Section 6.2.3, Table 2), the out-of-school were almost half of the children of school-going age at the time NPE-1986 was adopted. The above component of NPE-1986 implied that these out-of-school children shall be provided non-formal education, a *parallel stream* to the *mainstream* of formal school education. Most of the out-of-school children were working children, whether paid wages or not.⁵ Indeed, the notion of ‘mainstream’ emerged in India only because NPE-1986 gave legitimacy to a parallel stream such as non-formal education, a layer *below* the formal school. Until then, in principle, there was only one officially acknowledged, planned and financially supported stream in Indian education (i.e. government, local body and government-aided schools of comparable quality), the relatively minor streams of private unaided schools (erroneously called public schools) and Kendriya Vidyalayas (or Central Schools) notwithstanding.⁶ Recognising this, the Education Commission (1964-66) had strongly recommended the establishment of a *Common School System* (often misunderstood as *Uniform School System*) through the instrumentality of Neighbourhood Schools. The Common School System was accepted in the first National Policy on Education-1968 (i.e. NPE-1968) in order to ‘equalise educational opportunity’ for all children and to promote ‘social cohesion and national integration.’ In this sense, the policy imperative of non-formal education amounted to violating not only the Constitution and NPE-1968 but also NPE-1986 itself which had made the following commitment:

“The concept of a National System of Education implies that, up to a given level, all students, irrespective of caste, creed, location or sex, have access to education of a *comparable* quality. To achieve this, the Government will initiate appropriately funded programmes. Effective measures will be taken in the direction of the *Common School System recommended in the 1968 policy*.” [emphasis added]

National Policy on Education-1986, Section 3.2
(also retained in the Policy revised in 1992)

Since non-formal education was designed to be provided largely through evening centres, it was directed particularly to the child workers. POA-1986 was explicit on this point when it stated:

“. . . . it has been assumed in the Policy that a large number of out-of-school children are unable to avail themselves of the benefit of schooling because they have to work to supplement family income or otherwise assist the family. NPE proposes taking up of a large and systematic programme of non-formal education for these children and children of habitations without school.” (POA-1986, II.4)

The policy also had a special provision for afternoon centres for girls. This implied the willingness of the policy makers to adjust with, rather than challenge, the gender stereotype of the role of girls in domestic chores and sibling care.

In this sense, NPE-1986 legitimised both child labour and patriarchy. We shall soon return to this theme.

Unmasking the Rationalisation

The rationalisation for setting up alternative and parallel streams was offered by POA-1986 as follows.

"The essential characteristics of NFE are organizational flexibility, relevance of curriculum, diversity in learning activities to relate them to learners' needs, and decentralization of management." (POA-1986, II.25)

In the following paragraph (No. II.26) on NFE, POA-1986 listed a spectrum of features which were presumed to help in 'maintenance of quality'. These included a learner-centred approach, instructor as a facilitator, emphasis on learning rather than teaching, enabling learners to progress at their own pace, use of techniques to ensure fast pace of learning, stress on continuous learner evaluation, participatory learning environment, joyful extra-curricular activities etc. The next paragraph listed the criteria for selection of NFE instructors, taking care not to call them teachers!

"The criteria for the selection of the instructor would include

- being local,
- being already motivated,
- acceptable to the community,
- preferably from the weaker sections of society, should have given some evidence of work in the community." (POA-1986, II.27)

POA-1986 went on to add that,

"Keeping in view the importance of enrolment of girls, and also the fact that NFE has the potentiality of developing into a major programme of women's development, wherever possible women will be appointed as instructors." (POA-1986, II.28)

The notion of NFE was further elaborated in Government of India's report presented to the Jomtien Conference in March 1990 which stressed the characteristics of NFE in the following words:

"In terms of cognitive learning NFE is comparable with the corresponding stage in formal education. Attention is to be paid in NFE to non-cognitive aspects of learning, just as much as we propose in the school system.

It has flexibility to adjust curriculum and textual materials to the needs and interests of the learners.

Its total duration is generally shorter than in formal education.

The programme can be organised at the time convenient for the learners, generally in the afternoon for girls and in the evenings for working children.

It is not dependent on highly paid professional teachers but is organised by local persons who are specially trained for it.

There is the possibility of migration between the formal and non-formal systems."

- NIEPA (1990, p. 53-54)

Let us examine the bizarre logic behind the conception of NFE. The policy makers seem to be essentially telling us that the formal school system *should continue* to be characterised by,

- organisational inflexibility;
- centralised bureaucratic management;
- irrelevant curriculum;
- lack of diversity and flexibility in relating curriculum, textual materials and learning activities to the needs and interests of the learners; and
- school timings that would be inconvenient to almost half of the children, particularly to the girls and working children.

The policy makers are further clear that the formal schools *will continue* to practice a pedagogy that,

- negates learner-centred approach;
- refuses to view the 'instructor' as a facilitator for enabling children to learn;
- de-emphasises learning while emphasising *only* teaching;
- rejects the objective of enabling the learners to progress at their own pace;
- ignores techniques for ensuring fast pace of learning;
- disallows continuous learner evaluation (i.e. allows only summative evaluation at the end of the year, or worse, at the end of the primary stage),
- opposes participatory learning environment; and
- provides no space for joyful extra-curricular activities.

The policy further implies that the formal school system *should* appoint teachers who,

- belong to villages or urban localities far removed from the schools where they are expected to teach;
- are basically unmotivated;
- are unacceptable to the community;
- come from dominant sections of society (i.e. who are generally unsympathetic to the weaker sections);
- do not have any record of work in the community; and
- are generally not women, even when it is possible to appoint them

This is not all. According to the policy makers, the formal school system need neither be concerned with the enrolment of girls nor attempt to evolve into a major programme of women's development, as this gender-sensitive attribute should be the sole preserve of NFE! The formal school system, as policy makers seem to be declaring, is destined (or rather *should be destined*) to be gender-insensitive and anti-women!!

Preferring Contradictions!

(rather than resolving them!)

The policy makers had clearly decided that all the desirable features of education must belong to NFE whereas the formal school system should continue to be afflicted with all the undesirable features! If this was not the case, why would the policy not propose ways and means for incorporating these desirable features into the formal school system itself and, thereby, begin the process of educational reforms for all children? Indeed, this flawed logic is contradicted in the policy itself by the following two perceptions underlying the formulation of the NFE programme:

- i) In spite of these superior attributes designed in the policy, NFE shall aspire to be merely *comparable* with the corresponding stage in formal education, in terms of both the cognitive and non-cognitive development (NPE-1986, Section 5.9; NIEPA, 1990, pp. 53-54). This comparability is what will make 'migration between the formal and non formal systems' possible. One wonders why the superior attributes of NFE would only ensure 'lateral entry' into the formal school, and not entry at a higher stage! The policy is silent on this obvious contradiction.
- ii) All the desirable features of education - organisational, curricular and pedagogic - as listed in the policy and POA in relation to NFE, will be introduced by an 'instructor' whose levels of qualifications, teacher training, salary and other service conditions would be of much lower order than those of the regular teacher of the formal school system. Yet, these under-

qualified, essentially untrained and under-paid ‘instructors’ (without any stability in service) will for some magical reason turn out to be, as per NPE-1986 (Section 5.9), ‘talented and dedicated young men and women’, which, obviously the policy implies, their counterparts in the formal school system can’t be or rather should not be expected to be. Not just this. The NFE instructor, despite these handicaps, is expected by the policy makers to have much greater initiative and skills in attracting the presumably ‘unwilling’ and hitherto out-of-school children, particularly the girls and the working children, to the NFE centres and then ensuring their effective, enjoyable and, more importantly, relevant learning - something the formal school teacher is not expected to do! All this will be achieved by the ‘miraculous’ instructor by holding the NFE classes for merely 2-3 hour per day (in contrast to the formal school held for 4-5 hours per day) since the policy states that NFE’s ‘total duration is generally shorter than in formal education’ (NIEPA, 1990, p. 53). The expectations of the policy makers from the NFE instructors do not end here. Since no provision for even thatched huts (let alone buildings) or the teaching aids available under the Operation Blackboard scheme (meant only for formal schools) is made for NFE, the instructor is expected to use her/his ‘genius’ to even arrange for all these from the community, failing which what she/he is supposed to do, the policy prefers not to specify.

This entirely flawed logic and internal contradictions in the policy and POA relating to NFE were noticed and debated by the NPE Review Committee-1990 (NPERC or Acharya Ramamurti Committee, GOI, 1990)⁸ which observed:

“The above listed highly desirable features of NFE are indeed relevant to formal schools as well and they are also the essence of the child-centred approach mentioned by NPE. The criteria mentioned by POA for selection of NFE instructors - being local, being already motivated, acceptable to the community, being preferably from the weaker sections in society, having given some evidence of work in the community - are the criteria relevant to the selection of formal school teachers also. Therefore, it is unclear why the policy has advocated NFE, in effect, as a parallel system.” (GOI, 1990, Section 6.4.6)

Based upon this logic, the NPERC recommended that the formal school system be itself ‘non-formalised’ to include all the desirable features of NFE instead of setting up two parallel systems, one for the children from relatively better-off sections of society and the other for poor girls and working children (GOI, 1990, Chapter 6, pp. 169-172).⁹ The NPERC proposed specific policy changes and a detailed programme design for building up a responsive and relevant formal school system that can not only reach out to the children from marginalized social segments and remote habitations but also be much more socially and pedagogically meaningful to the children from the middle class and even the elite sections than is the prevailing formal school. In effect, NPERC seemed to be raising an uncomfortable question for the ruling Indian elite: Whom is the formal school system designed for if it is both inaccessible and unsuitable for almost half of India’s children? NPERC, therefore, advocated the necessity of transforming the formal school system itself in such manner that all children, irrespective of their socio-economic status, can socialise and learn together in consonance with the vision of the Common School System (GOI, 1990, pp. 92-93, 169-172, 182-184).

Policy’s Vision of Social Engineering

Both the NPE-1986 (Section 5.9) and POA 1986 (Chapter II, Section 25) insisted that NFE was designed in order to fulfill policy's overriding assumption that 'NFE can result in provision of education comparable in quality with formal schooling.' It is indeed ironical that the policy first creates a layer of lower quality below the formal school, mainly for poor girls and the child labour, and then claims to design features in it to make it 'comparable with formal schooling.' It prefers not to take any radical measures to transform the social and pedagogic character of the mainstream formal school system such that it will be able to attract the child labour as well as the children from remote habitations, particularly the girls, while ensuring that they enjoy learning and receive education that is relevant to their lives along with the rest of the children in their neighbourhood. The policy makers offer the following lame excuse for not taking the radical measure of transforming the formal school system:

"Given the present condition of the schools in general, the challenges before the school system are many, e.g., enrolling and retaining children who cannot afford to attend school regularly; a harmonious interaction with the community around, improving the infrastructure, quality and learning environment; and ensuring that every student acquires minimum levels of learning. *These challenges are daunting enough and it does not seem desirable to overload the school system with yet another formidable challenge of meeting the educational needs of children with severe para educational constraints.*" (emphasis added)

- Report of the CABE Committee on Policy (1992)

[GOI, 1992a, Section 9.13]

Three contradictions need to be noted in the above statement. One, the policy makers do not regard the 'daunting challenges' listed above to be the central task of the formal school system, if not the very *raison d'être* for its existence. Two, these 'daunting challenges' do not seem to constitute 'the educational needs of children with severe para educational constraints'. One wonders what will. Also, the policy erroneously assumes that it is the child, rather than the school system, that is handicapped by 'severe para educational constraints'. Is the above lame excuse offered because of the lack of policy makers' interest in either abolishing child labour or changing the role of girls from poor families in domestic chores and sibling care? This is obvious since the timings of the NFE centres were adjusted to evenings for the child labour and afternoons for the girls, instead of ensuring that they come to a regular *day-time* formal school, thereby challenging the socio-cultural constraints operating on their lives, as has been successfully demonstrated by MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh and advocated by Sinha (2000). The fact is that the policy conceived of a parallel stream like NFE which, instead of helping to eliminate the practice of child labour and resist patriarchy, ended up adjusting with and legitimising it.

The policy makers were determined to institutionalise the newly emerging principle of social engineering through parallel layers of so-called educational facilities (not schools). NPERC's recommendation, therefore, to transform the infrastructural, social and pedagogic character of the formal school system did not find favour with the CABE Committee on Policy (GOI, 1992a, Sections 9.7-9.13) which re-iterated the same flawed logic critiqued above.⁶ The NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992), accordingly, retained the parallel NFE stream for crores of working children (two-thirds of them being girls), without providing a feasible design in the modified POA-1992 for radically transforming or improving the formal school system.

Extending this spurious logic, it was only natural for the CABE Committee on Policy to also reject NPERC's recommendation for building up a Common School System (GOI, 1992a, Sections 6.1-6.6). This retrogressive stand of the CABE Committee on Policy with regard to NFE and Common School System at least followed an internally consistent logic and thus enabled the State to clear the path, as we shall see later, for the Structural Adjustment Programme being then imposed on the Indian economy by IMF and the World Bank.

Camouflage

We may recall the laborious rationalisation that the policy makers preferred to indulge in, which amounted to somehow deluding oneself to trust the rhetoric about the superior attributes of NFE (in comparison to formal schools) designed in the policy. However, there is substantial evidence that none of this indulgence had its genesis in a genuine concern for the deprived girls engaged in domestic chores and sibling care, working children or the children living in remote habitations, but in the perception of the policy makers about the lack of financial resources available for elementary education. An insight into the mindset of the State is provided by the perspective document entitled, 'Challenge of Education A Policy Perspective' released by the Government of India as a prelude to NPE-1986 in the following words:

"Now, faced with other constraints, Non-Formal education is being assigned a very large responsibility in relation to the achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education by 1990. It is expected that of the additional 64 million children coming up for elementary education, nearly 39 million will be educated entirely through this system." (GOI, 1985, Section 3.13) [emphasis added]

This brings out three undeniable facts.

- i) The policy makers had made up their mind about institutionalising non-formal education for the marginalised sections of society as a parallel layer to the formal school system *well before* the draft NPE-1986 was circulated all over the country for the much-hyped debate amongst the people of India. Does it not imply that the so-called public debate on the draft NPE-1986 was a mere eye-wash, if not a complete farce? Or may be, it was a means of necessary legitimization in a democracy?
- ii) The non-formal stream was not designed as a minor stream. It was expected to be a bigger stream than even the formal stream – for almost 60.9% of the additional children 'coming up for elementary education' (i.e. 39 million out of 64 million children).
- iii) The government was '*faced with other constraints*' that persuaded it to substitute the vision of the Common School System with the policy of 'parallel layers'. Having done this, the policy makers indulged in the rhetoric of NFE having organisational, curricular and pedagogic attributes that were supposedly superior to the formal school system.

It is almost scary to realise how policies are formulated. Contrary to the public perception, policies are made without any objective basis or scientific evaluation. Let us see what does the 'Challenge of Education' document say on this issue:

"To-date, no systematic study of the effectiveness of Non-Formal Education is available. It is being argued by some educational planners that this may not be a **viable alternative to school education**. There are difficulties in the effective monitoring and **evaluation** of its **implementation**. These arguments have to be balanced against the necessity of using some mechanism to **reach** children outside the formal education system." (GOI, 1985, Section 3.14)

What were these constraints faced by the Government in 1985 that persuaded it to violate the Common School vision of the NPE-1968 (and later also of NPE-1986)? What were those compulsions against which the sound logic of the educational planners had to be balanced against? Answer to such questions is provided by the same 'Challenge of Education' document in the following paragraph:

"..... any substantial improvement in educational coverage as well as retention, which constitutes the core of universalisation of elementary education efforts, will not only require significant increase in educational expenditure on elementary education *but will also have a multiplier effect on the total education budget through increased enrolments in the secondary and higher education*. Hence, policy deliberations vis-a-vis universalisation of elementary education need to be matched with hard financial decisions. Alternatively, other educational approaches, such as non-formal/distance education, and vocationalisation have to be worked out in detail for a large scale implementation and replication. [Emphasis added]" (GOI, 1985, Sections 4.64 and 4.65)

It is then clear that the policy makers were not persuaded by the superior attributes conceived by them for NFE but by the perceived financial constraints. Since 'policy deliberations vis-a-vis universalisation of elementary education need(ed) to be matched with hard financial decisions', NPE-1986 saw in NFE a way out of the dilemma of providing education to 60.9% of the children in the relevant age group. It did not matter much even if 'no systematic study of the effectiveness of Non-Formal Education (was) available' or if some educational planners did not see in this 'a viable alternative to school education.' After all, NFE was meant only for the marginalised children, not for the children of the middle class families or those of the ruling elite! However, in a democracy like India, one needed to exercise abundant caution. The camouflage of attaching the rhetoric of superior attributes to NFE was, therefore, cleverly designed and incorporated in the policy statement as well as the POA-1986. The Government of India had no hesitation in presenting even the Jomtien Conference held in March 1990 with the same camouflage. The international funding agencies might have even welcomed this camouflage since, as we shall see in the next Section, the Jomtien Conference was organised precisely for preparing the groundwork for imposing the Structural Adjustment Programme of IMF and the World Bank requiring developing countries like India to minimise their expenditure on the social sector. One of the most significant victims of this requirement in the next few years was going to be elementary education. It is a moot point whether NFE was an outcome of the financial constraints as perceived by the Indian policy makers or of a lack of commitment on their part to push forward the vision of egalitarian education inherent in the Common School System. Or may be it was designed to fit in the framework of the Structural Adjustment Programme which might have been quietly operational in India well before it was publicly declared as an inevitable part of the New Economic Policy from July 1991 onwards. Whatever may be the compulsions, it is now understood retrospectively that NFE provided the foundation for institutionalising a range of parallel layers of low quality streams of educational facilities for different social segments in the wake of the neo-liberal agenda.

Post-Jomtien Phase of Indian Education

The Jomtien Conference was jointly convened by the UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and The World Bank.¹¹ These international agencies have continued to hold follow-up conferences at both the regional and global levels during the Nineties.¹² The decadal follow-up of the

Jomtien Conference was held at Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 wherein the progress made by the various nations to achieve the EFA goals as set out by the Jomtien Declaration was reviewed. Just as the Jomtien Declaration guided educational planning throughout the Nineties, the Dakar Framework of Action (World Education Forum, 2000) has now become the new policy-level international guide post for the first 15 years of the 21st century.¹³

The Jomtien Conference proved to be a turning point in the history of education in India. The Government of India gave a hasty concurrence to the Jomtien Declaration (UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank, 1990), without even consulting the Parliament on its major Constitutional and policy implications. This marked the beginning of the phase of steady erosion of Parliament's role in policy formulation in education as well as of the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Human Resource Development in formulating the agenda of Indian education and setting its priorities. As provided for in the Jomtien Declaration (Article 10) and Jomtien Framework (Section 3.3), external aid from a host of international funding agencies, operating under the World Bank umbrella, was systematically allowed in the primary education sector *as a matter of policy* for the first time in post-independence India.¹⁴ This policy departure coincided with the beginning of the New Economic Policy in July 1991 in India. With this, it became necessary for the Government to accept the IMF-World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme. The launching of the first World Bank-sponsored comprehensive District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) in 1993-94 was part of this requirement and its attendant Social Safety Net provided under IMF-World Bank design (GOI, 1993, p. 88). The serious implication of this new situation was recognized by the Government. The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) at its 46th meeting in March 1991 formulated a set of guidelines for externally aided projects which were re-iterated at the 47th meeting in May 1992. These guidelines sought to ensure that "external assistance does not lead to a dependency syndrome" and remains "an additionality to the (national) resources for education" while being in "total conformity with the national policies, strategies and programmes" (GOI, 1993, p. 89).

Yet, a series of policy-related documents were issued during the following years, each impacting upon the policy in a significant manner. The list will include Education For All (GOI, 1993), DPEP (GOI, 1995, 1998), Education Guarantee Scheme (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1998, pp. 9-12), Para Teacher scheme (Ed. CIL, 2000; GOI, 2001a), Ambani-Birla Report (GOI, 2000), National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCERT, 2000) and Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative & Innovative Education (GOI, 2001a). The minimum norms for school infrastructure and strength of teachers in a primary school, as specified in Operation Blockboard of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992), were diluted for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and EFA-National Plan of Action (GOI, 2002, 2003a; Tilak, 2003; Sadgopal 2003c). Similarly, the policy relating to women's education stands diluted – from empowering women to merely enrolling girls on school registers – in line with the Jomtien and Dakar Frameworks, as also reinforced by the monitoring parameters (e.g. Gender Parity Index, an index based on enrollment ratios) formulated by UNESCO (Sadgopal, 2003c). For none of these, it was considered necessary to take approval

of the Parliament, even when these contradicted elements of the education policy approved by the Parliament.

During the post-Jomtien phase, the Indian education policy was diluted in the following significant ways, whether directly as part of the externally aided projects (e.g. DPEP) or otherwise (e.g. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan):

- **Trivialisation of educational aims:** Education being made synonymous with literacy (Sadgopal, 1994); competency-based market-oriented narrow framework of Minimum Levels of Learning (MLL) imposed on curricular planning and assessment (Dhankar, 2002; Sadgopal, 2002b, p. 118-120); education of girls viewed in terms of only reducing their fertility rates, slowing population growth or increasing their productivity (World Bank, 1997, pp. 1, 39, 53); basically education being viewed in behavioural paradigm.
- **Fragmentation of knowledge:** The ‘world of work’ separated from the ‘world of knowledge’, thereby reinforcing the Brahmanical-cum-colonial character of Indian education¹⁵; cognitive domain viewed in isolation of the affective domain and psycho-motor skills (e.g. in MLL); primary education de-linked from upper primary stage, ignoring the concept of integrated elementary education of eight years¹⁶.
- **Withdrawal from policy commitment to build a Common School System:** As discussed earlier in this paper, the issue of improvement (or transformation, if necessary) of quality and relevance of the formal school system in order to build a Common School System for all children was gradually de-focused after NPE-1986, particularly during the post-Jomtien phase. Instead, institutionalisation of multiple or parallel tracks of low-quality ‘educational’ facilities replaced the Common School policy as the key strategy for providing the so-called education to crores of out-of-school children belonging to *dalit* and tribal sections of societies, several segments of other backward classes, cultural and linguistic minorities, and physically and mentally disabled. Two-thirds of each of these sections, facing educational discrimination, comprised girl children. Apart from continuing with NPE during the post-Jomtien phase, the following multiple tracks or parallel streams were introduced: accommodating the 9-14 age group children in adult literacy classes (GOI, 1993, p. 51)¹⁷, Alternative Schools (GOI, 1998, p. 18), Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) Centres (Government of Madhya Pradesh, 1998, pp. 9-12; GOI, 2001a; 2001b, Section 3.2.2.2), Multi-Grade/Multi-Level Teaching (GOI, 1995, p. 10, 16; 1998, p.18), Bridge Courses and Back-to-School Camps (GOI, 2001b, Section 3.2.2.2; 2002, p.11) and correspondence courses for the 6-14 age group (NCERT, 2000, pp. 22-23; GOI, 2001b, Section 3.4.18; 2003a, p. 44; 2003b,c, Schedule A).

Four sets of observations will be made here to reveal the ruthlessness with which the State has pursued its agenda of promoting and institutionalizing inequality in education.

a) EGS has no provision whatsoever for any infrastructure (not even for a tent or thatched roof); its supposedly chief beneficiaries viz. the *dalit* or tribal communities are expected, as per the EGS design, to arrange for some space for the centre (GOI, 2001a)!

b) In externally aided DPEP, Multi-Grade/Multi-Level Teaching has meant nothing other than one/two teacher(s) being trained to teach five classes simultaneously out of sheer necessity. In spite of the confused rhetoric by the DPEP authorities, it is not designed to be the progressive pedagogy of 'grade-less teaching', as is the case at Digantar (experimental schools practicing grade-less teaching) near Jaipur, Rajasthan. DPEP has thus violated the Operation Blackboard norms of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) for providing at least three teachers and three classrooms to every primary school. Dhankar (2002) analyses this DPEP policy aptly:

"The need and rationale for multi-grade teaching is either socio-political or managerial; and *pedagogical considerations are only grafted on to it* The real solution to the problem is to appoint more teachers But appointing more teachers costs money. Since most of the children in these schools belong to the weaker sections of society, *casie*: and less expensive solutions are sought. Therefore, a pedagogical solution for this socio-economic problem is devised in the name of multi-grade teaching strategies. As the (conventional) grade was used to manage children, now in a changed situation the idea of multi-grade is used for the same purpose. claiming that (it) is an effort for quality improvement, is *nothing more than making a virtue out of an ugly necessity* – ugly because the children who bear the brunt belong to the weaker sections of the society." (emphasis ours)

The policy (Section 5.7) had stated that 'Operation Blackboard will be enlarged to provide *three reasonably large rooms* that are usable in all weather and (a range of teaching aids)' and 'at least *three teachers* should work in every school, the *number increasing, as early as possible, to one teacher per class* at least 50 per cent of teachers recruited in future should be women' (emphasis added). To be sure, these norms were approved by the Parliament in May 1992. Through Multi-Grade/Multi-Level Teaching, DPEP has cynically attempted to justify the single teacher and two-teacher schools (almost two-thirds of all primary schools), instead of building up political pressure or legislative action or catalyzing community demand for fulfillment of Operation Blackboard commitments. This violation during the late Nineties, touted as an interim strategy, apparently opened the doors at the beginning of this century for institutionalising the dilution of Operation Blackboard norms from three teachers-three classrooms per primary school to two teacher-two classroom per primary school in Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007) and EFA – National Plan of Action (2003). This dilution is now the basis of financial allocations (GOI, 2003a, Table 9.3, p. 92). It also explains, at least partly, how the Government managed to reduce the Tapas Majumdar Committee's estimates by 30% for the Financial Memorandum attached to the 86th Amendment Bill.

c) NCERT (2000, pp. 22-23) recommended correspondence courses (euphemized as Open Schooling or Open Learning System) for the 6-14 age group without any

basis in educationa. research or experience whatsoever. Again, this proposal is in violation of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) which had restricted the role of the so-called 'open learning system' to secondary and higher education (Section 5.37). Yet, such a farcical pedagogic notion is already a part of the Tenth Five Year Plan (GOI, 2001b, Section 3.4.18) and EFA - National Plan of Action (GOI, 2003a, p. 44) and will be shortly presented to the Parliament for legitimization (GOI, 2006b,c, Schedule A). Apart from legitimizing child labour, the introduction of correspondence courses for the 6-14 age group children, most of them being 'first generation learners', implies that the girl child will be *officially* denied the *relatively* more liberating atmosphere offered by school than what she is likely to get at home, bound by patriarchal traditions (Sadgopal, 2003c).

d) Whenever faced with criticism throughout the Nineties, the policy makers claimed that these multiple tracks or parallel streams are merely *interim or transitional* arrangements in order to *eventually* mainstream all children to reach regular formal schools. This is precisely what the nation was told about non-formal education in the wake of NPE-1986 and in the years following NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) which promised that the NFE scheme 'will be strengthened and enlarged' (Section 5.8). The EFA (1993) again assured that 'many measures are being adopted to further strengthen this scheme' (GOI, 1993, p. 51). In 1995, the externally aided DPEP asserted that it would 'strive for the development of an effective NFE system which can meet the diverse educational needs of children' (GOI, 1995, Chapter II, Section 17). In 1998, DPEP declared that 'every state is deciding to set up different forms of alternative schools to ensure participation of working children, street children, children of migrating communities, drop outs etc.' (GOI, 1998, p. 18). To be sure, all the categories of out-of-school children mentioned in the DPEP of 1998 are same as those mentioned in NFE scheme of 1986 policy. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2002) informs that,

"Studies on the Non-Formal Education scheme have pointed out the lack of flexibility which impedes effective implementation across different States. Efforts to provide for a diversity of interventions have been made in the revised scheme that has been approved recently such as setting up of Education Guarantee Schools, Alternative Schooling facilities, Balika Shikshan Shivirs, 'Back-to-School' camps etc." (GOI, 2002, Chapter III, Section 3.5, p. 35).

We should be prepared for yet another revision of the scheme in the near future since the target of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan of 'providing universal enrolment by the year 2003' is far from being met. The above policy analysis shows that these multiple tracks or parallel streams are there to stay with us for as long as the policy makers refuse to (a) focus attention on transforming the mainstream formal school system; (b) build a Common School System; and (c) reprioritise national economy to ensure adequate resources for this central nation-building task. Otherwise, the promise of making these multiple tracks into 'transitional schools' - the latest name for the range of NFE schemes - will remain an elusive dream.

- **Lowering the status of school teacher:** In unabashed violation of Sections 9.1 to 9.3 of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) that call for raising the status of teachers, the post-Jomtien *operating* policy has been to replace the teacher with under-qualified, untrained (or under-trained) and under-paid persons appointed on short-term contracts, to be called Para-Teachers (Ed. CIL report on Para-Teachers, 2000; GOI, 2001a; Kumar *et al*, 2001; Sadgopal, 2002b, p. 118 & 2003a, p. 15). The Para-Teacher is known by a variety of euphemisms in different States viz. *Guruji*, *Lok Shikshak*, *Shiksha Karmi*, *Lok Mitra*, *Vidya Upasak*, *Vidya Volunteer* etc. but care is taken not to call her/him a teacher. This policy of para-teacher is now being rapidly extended to secondary and higher education as well, clearly to facilitate privatization and commercialization of education.
- **Erosion of women's education policy:** The NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) provided for a sharp perspective on 'Education for Women's Equality' (Sections 4.2 and 4.3) as follows:

"Education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values This will be an act of faith"

The entire credit for this progressive stance must go to India's own women's movement which persuaded even the policy makers to move away from the conventional notions. The only programme that was designed to reflect this policy insight was *Mahila Samakhya*. Its objective was to enhance the self-esteem and self-confidence of women; build their positive image by recognising their contribution to society, polity and the economy; develop their ability to think critically; enable them to make informed choices in areas like education, employment and health, especially reproductive health; and ensure equal participation in developmental processes (POA-1992, Chapter 1: Section 1.5.1). However, *Mahila Samakhya* remained marginal throughout the Nineties. For every 100 rupees allocated for elementary education in the Union Budget, hardly 25 paise were given to it. In due course of time, even this minuscule programme lost its basic direction.

The Jomtien-Dakar Framework does not even refer to patriarchy as an issue and essentially reduces girls' education to merely enrolling them on school registers and giving them literacy skills. This is exactly what happened when World Bank-sponsored DPEP adopted *Mahila Samakhya*. The focus on collective reflection and socio-cultural action by organized women groups, as advocated by the policy, was abandoned. It became a *mere girl child enrolment* programme. Critical issues such as girls' participation in schools, gender sensitization of learning material and teacher education and holistic educational aims were ignored. Unfortunately, the notion of gender parity (ratio of enrolment of girls and boys) in UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003-04 also reinforces this confusion. Also, the World Bank diluted the goal of women's education to just raising their literacy levels and productivity (rather than educating or empowering them) and turning them into mere

transmitters of fertility control, health or nutritional messages (World Bank, 1997). The Dakar Framework has now added the ambiguous notion of Life Skills that seems to be yet another mechanism for social manipulation and market control of the adolescent mindset, particularly the girls. India unfortunately gave up its progressive policy on women's education in favour of the international framework that was guided more by the considerations of market than by women's socio-cultural and political rights.

- **Increasing abdication by the State:** We will only briefly touch upon this alarming post-Jomtien trend here since it has been referred to elsewhere as well as reflected in the various aspects of policy dilution listed above. What is needed is recognition of the relationship between these trends and IMF-World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme which is accelerating the pace of moving Indian education towards privatization and commercialization, as proposed by Ambani-Birla Report (GOI, 2000). However, we need to advance our understanding beyond the Ambani-Birla formulations which gave the false impression that it called for privatization only in higher education and partly in secondary education – the Report seemed to be saying that elementary education must be entirely a State responsibility. The post-Jomtien policy measures adopted by the Indian policy makers have evidently enabled the State to rapidly withdraw even from the elementary education sector. This is reflected in the ever reducing financial commitment for this sector, as discussed in detail below in the context of the 93rd (now called 86th) Amendment. There is mounting evidence that the State is not ready to re-prioritise the national economy in favour of education of the deprived sections of society and has become dependent on external aid, as it seems to be refusing to provide for even the diluted policy measures and for the much reduced financial requirement.¹⁸ This official stance is in clear violation of the CABE guidelines against 'dependency syndrome' and policy dilutions in relation to external aid (GOI, 1993, p. 89)

The following observation by Tomasevski (2001) on the Jomtien Declaration and Framework will provide the necessary perspective for comprehending the adverse changes in Indian education during the post-Jomtien phase:

"The language of the final document adopted by the Jomtien Conference merged human needs and market forces, moved education from governmental to social responsibility, made no reference to the international legal requirement that primary education be free-of-charge, introduced the term 'basic education' which confused conceptual and statistical categories. The language elaborated at Jomtien was different from the language of international human rights law."

- Tomasevski, K. (2001)
Special Rapporteur on the right to education
to United Nations Commission on Human Rights

Taking an early cue from the Jomtien Declaration and foreseeing political, historical and educational significance of this turning point, this author proposed to view the post-independence history of education in India in two separate phases for the purpose of policy analysis viz. Pre-Jomtien and Post-Jomtien phases (Sadgopal, 1994).

Tampering with the Constitution

Back to the 93rd (now called as 86th) Amendment debate in Lok Sabha. The amendment Bill had the following four major lacunae:

- i) The Bill sought to exclude almost 17 crore children up to six years of age from the provision of Fundamental Right to *free* early childhood care and pre-school education. This was in contravention of NPE-1986 (As modified in 1992) which considered this support during childhood as being crucial for child development and preparation for elementary education (Sections 5.1 to 5.4). The implication was clear: early childhood care and pre-school education will be denied to not less than 40% of the children in this age group, two-thirds of them being girls, whose parents barely manage to earn minimum wages. This will also prevent girls in the 6-14 age group, belonging to the same sections of society, from receiving elementary education as they will be engaged in sibling care.
- ii) The Bill made the provision of Fundamental Right to education even for the 6-14 age group children conditional by introducing the phrase '*as the State may, by law, determine*' in the new Article 21A. The implications of this phrase will be discussed below.
- iii) The Bill shifted the Constitutional obligation towards 'free and compulsory education' from the State to the parents or guardians by making it a Fundamental Duty of the latter under Article 51A (k) to '*provide opportunities for education*' to their children in the 6-14 age group. This purpose is now sought to be achieved by promoting and legitimizing 'community participation' in raising resources for elementary education (GOI, 2003b,c), yet another measure towards abdication by the State.
- iv) The Financial Memorandum attached to the Bill provided for only Rs. 9,800 crores per annum (i.e. 0.44% of GDP in 2002-03) over a ten year period for implementing the provisions under the Bill. This commitment was far from being adequate, as it was 30% less than what was estimated by the Tapas Majumdar Committee in 1999 to provide elementary education to all the out-of-school children through *regular formal schools*. This lower estimate was made possible by depending on low-quality parallel tracks of education and lowering several other critically important infrastructural and pedagogic norms for deprived sections of society (Tilak, 2003 and Sadgopal, 2003c).

Detailed critiques of the 93rd Amendment Bill contended that the lacunae were deliberate, rather than being a result of an oversight (see Sadgopal 2001a,b,c,d and 2002a; Swaminathan, 2001). The amendment was being made, these writings sought to establish, not to make elementary education a Fundamental Right, but to fulfill the dictates of IMF-World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme that demanded reduction in public expenditure on social sector. The lack of guarantee of free early childhood care and pre-school education will not only result in underdevelopment of the deprived children during childhood but will also adversely affect their learning capacity during school education.

In particular, the above critiques focused upon the implications of the phrase '*as the State may, by law, determine*'. No such conditionalities existed in the original Article 45. It is contended that the phrase was introduced in order to legitimize the low-budget low quality multiple and parallel tracks of so-called educational facilities for poor children as well as other forms of policy dilutions discussed above. This phrase also legitimizes the increasing abdication by the State of its Constitutional obligation towards ensuring elementary education of *equitable* quality for all children.

To the agitated MPs from various political parties who criticized the Bill in both Houses of the Parliament, an assurance was repeatedly given by the Minister that the lacunae in the Bill will be taken care of by enacting a new law. How would a law take care of the lacunae introduced in the Constitution through an amendment? If the Government intended to rectify the lacunae later through a law, why was it bent upon introducing these in the Constitution in the first place? The leadership of various political parties neither raised nor pursued such uncomfortable questions in the Parliament. The assurance of a law to be enacted later seemed to have led to a curious consensus in the Parliament on the Constitutional amendment (now termed the 86th amendment), in spite of its unambiguous bias against crores of children (girl children in particular) belonging to various deprived sections of society (Sadgopal, 2001d, 2002a) and violations of several provisions in the Constitution relating to Parts III and IV.

The Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2004

Let me also briefly examine the draft 'Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2004' (GOI, 2004, Draft III). This is the law that was promised by the previous NDA Government in Parliament, presumably to take care of the lacunae in the 86th Amendment Bill. Ironically, a careful scrutiny reveals that, instead of 'taking care of the lacunae' in the 86th Constitutional Amendment, the aforementioned draft Bill increases the lacunae in several ways. It would suffice to refer to Schedules I & II of the Bill which together provide for *three types* of centres for 'imparting education', specifying their respective minimum norms. The draft Bill thus is an unabashed attempt to legitimise parallel streams of education of differential quality viz. regular schools, EGS Centres and Alternative Schools, already institutionalized in the *operating* policy and programmes (e.g. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan), for the deprived sections of society. This will also legitimise the undesirable sociological principle of 'a separate educational stream for each social strata.'

The draft Bill is both ambiguous and weak on inclusion of the physically and mentally disabled children in the regular approved schools. Its provisions will encourage as well as facilitate violation of the policy commitment for inclusive education which is integral to the fulfillment of Constitutional obligation for equality in education and for building up the Common School System (Jha, 2003). As noted by Jha (2003), the Bill might even promote privatization and commercialization of the education of the disabled.

A detailed and holistic analysis was presented by me at two consultations organized by MV Foundation and CACL in Hyderabad and Bhubaneswar respectively (Sadgopal, 2004a) and some other aspects documented elsewhere (Sadgopal, 2004b). This established that the Draft

Bill attempted to (a) legitimize low quality educational streams for under-privileged sections of society; (b) provide legitimate space for extra-constitutional authorities to introduce their ideological agenda in school education while keeping them outside the purview of the constitutional framework; (c) negate the role of panchayati raj institutions; (d) promote privatisation and 'corporatisation' of school education; (e) franchise parts or whole districts to NGOs, corporate or religious bodies for running elementary schools; (f) shift the state's constitutional obligation towards elementary education to the parents and local communities; (g) promote "special schools" for disabled children at the cost of inclusive education; and introduce a range of other distortions.

In a sense, the draft Bill carries forward the process of abdication by the State of its Constitutional obligation for which a legitimised space was created by the 86th Constitutional Amendment by attaching the conditionality i.e. '*as the State may, by law, determine*' to the guarantee of right to free and compulsory education for children in the 6-14 age group. The Draft Bill is designed to fully protect and also 'guarantee' the exclusion and discrimination institutionalised by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in its following statement:

"All children in school, Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) centre, alternate school, 'back-to-school camp' by 2003." (GOI, 2003a, p. 27)

With this guarantee for protection, the State is continuing to persist in its refusal to reprioritise national economy and pursue its campaign for seeking increased external aid, thereby further subjugating nation's education system and policies to the control of the global market.

Resources, National Economy and External Aid

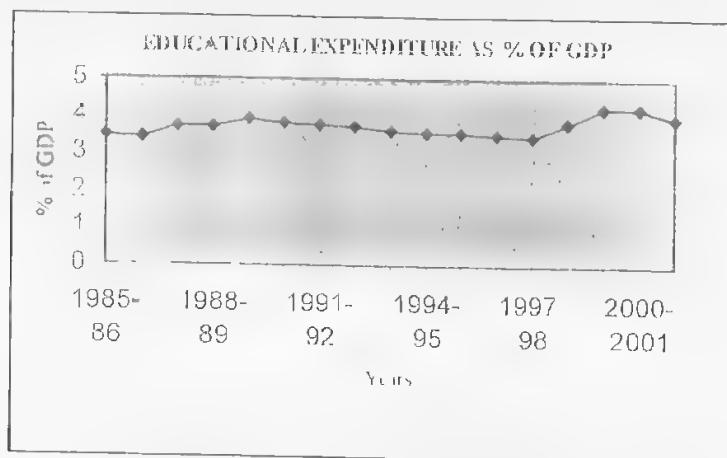
The externally assisted DPEP started in 1993-94 and, by the year 2000, it had spread to 275 odd districts in 18 States – almost half of the country. Government of India's Education For All document (1993), while reproducing the CABE guidelines for externally aided projects, partly also cited earlier, stated.

"It would be fair to say that while external funding would be an interim contribution to meet the resource gap, there is *no alternative other than augmenting domestic resources* to achieve the objective of EFA. Economic liberalization and the consequent financial restructuring can be *expected to facilitate greater resource flow to elementary education*" [emphasis added]

- Education For All: The Indian Scene, Govt. of India, 1993, p. 90

External aid has had an adverse impact on the political will to reprioritise national economy for mobilizing public resources for universalisation of elementary education. Soon after the 1986 policy, we saw an upswing in national effort to mobilize public resources for education. By 1989-90, almost 4% of GDP was being spent on education, with little less than half on elementary education. Ironically, with the onset of external aid in primary education in the Nineties, the investment in education (including in elementary education) started declining steadily and was as low as 3.49% of GDP in 1997-98, the same level as in 1985-86, just before 1986 policy. Clearly, the political will to mobilize resources for elementary education weakened following the entry of external aid. It is only during the last 2-3 years that there has

been some improvement, followed by declining trend again in 2001-2002, though the level of external aid was twice in this year than that of 1997-98.



Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2001-02
[Recalculated on the basis of 'Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education' (various years), Ministry of HRD]

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In January 2004, the previous Government signed yet another agreement with the World Bank for a loan of Rs. 4710 crore for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for 2004-2007 i.e. Rs. 1,570 crore per year (World Bank, 2004). At the current level of GDP, this loan amounts to merely 0.06% of GDP i.e. merely 6 paise out of every Rs. 100 India will earn in 2004-2005 (the level of total external assistance in this sector since 1993-94 has invariably been much lower than this level)! For this pittance, we entered into conditionalities that will never be made public, as has been the case with externally aided projects since 1993-94.

The official stance is in clear violation of the CABE guidelines against 'dependency syndrome' and policy dilutions in relation to external aid (GOI, 1993, p. 89). This dependence on external aid in fact implies that *there need not be any change in the priorities of national economy* since additional funds will keep flowing in, as long as the Government of India is willing to adjust its educational policy to the conditionalities of the international funding agencies. These are matters of great concern for those of us who have been consistently questioning the role of external aid in elementary education. This issue has unfortunately not found any recognition in the CMP of the UPA government and is yet to become a part of the political discourse at the national level.

We need to advance our understanding beyond the Ambani-Birla formulations which gave the false impression that it called for privatization only in higher education and partly in secondary education – the Report seemed to be saying that elementary education must be entirely a State responsibility. The post-Jomtien policy measures adopted by the Indian policy makers, however, have evidently enabled the State to rapidly withdraw even from the elementary education sector. This is reflected in the ever-reducing financial commitment for this sector, as discussed earlier in the context of the 86th Constitutional Amendment and elsewhere (Endnote No. 19 has four significant comments on the ambiguous position taken by UPA in its CMP on this issue).⁹ There is thus mounting evidence that the State is not ready to re-prioritise the national economy in favour of education of the deprived sections of

society and has become dependent on external aid for this purpose, as it seems to be refusing to provide for even the diluted policy measures and for the much reduced financial requirement.¹⁸

Conclusion

This paper has sought to establish that the exclusion and discrimination inherent in the present *operating* education policy (to be distinguished from that passed by the Parliament), though considerably exacerbated by the impact of globalization, has its roots in the national policies formulated well before the global market forces gained a dominant position in India. In this we have a significant lesson: As we must deepen our analysis to comprehend the nature and full dimension of the adverse impact of globalization on Indian education, we can not exonerate our own policy makers from accepting primary responsibility for the collapse of Indian education policy since independence. Indeed, the weaknesses and internal contradictions in our policy provided the necessary political space to the forces of globalization to intervene in Indian education.

How do you expect the education system to be any better if flawed policies are being implemented? I would rather contend that the State is normally quite efficient (inefficiency is rather deliberate and selectively practiced!). The education system is the disaster that it is due to reasonably *efficient implementation of flawed policies*. A corollary, but a critical, lesson is about the significance of evolving and sharpening the tools of policy analysis and applying them for deciphering the mindset of the State as well as the global market forces. Also, this enterprise must not be diluted by getting lost in the *analysis of implementation* of the policy. Rather, attention must remain focused on analysis of the *character of the policy* itself and, through this, of the State.

While the State abdicates its obligations and implements such exclusionary and discriminatory education policy for the vast sections of Indian society, it promotes, at the same time, privatization and commercialization of school education (not to speak of higher education which is beyond the scope of this paper) to benefit an upward mobile minority. For this purpose, it extends *direct subsidy* to the so-called public schools for the rich and upper middle class by (a) making available prime land in urban areas on highly reduced costs; (b) exempting their income as well as donations to their Trusts/Societies under the Income Tax Act; (c) providing, free of cost, professionally trained teachers who received their diplomas/degrees through publicly subsidized teacher education programmes; and (d) giving their institutions and examinations due recognition through Government-supported CBSE or State Boards of Examinations. Yet, these directly subsidized private schools are not expected to fulfill any of their Constitutional obligations for ensuring *free education of equitable quality* for India's future generations.²⁰ The recent trend of some of these private schools undertaking patronizing measures (often by setting up parallel streams of their own) for handful of deprived children must not be allowed to confuse the policy discourse. In contrast, the State expresses its desperation regarding lack of resources for fulfilling its Constitutional obligations, unless external aid is increased, *seemingly* unmindful of the ways in which India's education policy and agenda have been already undermined by globalization.



Indian education has hardly acknowledged that issues such as disparity, socio-economic stratification and caste hierarchies, patriarchy and gender inequity, conflicts of cultural and ethnic identity, unemployment and disemployment, regional imbalances, a development policy biased against the masses, inappropriate distribution of the economic cake, hegemonic control over natural resources, attrition of values inherited from the freedom struggle and cynical attack on democratic institutions have had a decisive impact on the structure and processes of education. The rise of communalism and the consequent attempts to impose mono-cultural hegemony during the past couple of decades has seriously begun to threaten the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual character of Indian nationhood. We have already witnessed the cynical communal assault on the nature of knowledge inherent in school curriculum (SAHMAT, 2001; Sadgopal, 2004b). Policy formulation and any realistic planning of education, therefore, call for reviewing the role of education in social change and re-designing the entire education system to deal with these issues. We must also begin to take note of the rapidly emerging linkages, howsoever tenuous these might seem to be at present, between neo-liberal and communal forces. There is no space whatsoever either in the Jonitien Declaration or in the framework of any of the externally aided programmes for building up a meaningful policy discourse on such critical issues.

It is a matter of serious concern that the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the UPA Government also continues to suffer from several of the lacunae and contradictions that have afflicted policy formulation since independence. More significantly, it shows no evidence of consciousness of the challenge posed by the neo-liberal forces on the character of our education policies and the system as a whole. A detailed constructive critique of the education component of CMP has already drawn the attention of the UPA leadership, including the Prime Minister and the Minister of HRD, as well as of the leadership of its Left coalition partners to these concerns and sought reconstruction of the education policy in consonance with the principles enshrined in the Constitution (Bharat Jan Vigyan Jatha, 2004).

It would not be an overstatement to assert that this policy of exclusion and discrimination amounts to *denial of knowledge* to almost 60% to 70% of India's people, while also preventing them from participation in its creation as well as control. In this sense, the stance of the State and its collusion with the forces of globalization needs to be viewed as an assault of epistemic nature on Indian society (Sadgopal, 2002b, 2003a, 2004b). The assault is designed to control the access, production and distribution of knowledge across nations and social classes. It is only by regulating, controlling and distorting knowledge that these forces can dictate their neo-liberal agenda to various nations and large sections of the global society. This paper has attempted to reveal some of such processes and mechanisms already instituted in the Indian school system and adversely impacting on children's right to education. The impact of the neo-liberal assault on the higher education system has been extensively documented by researchers elsewhere. The design for the attrition of the democratic, secular and egalitarian fabric of Indian society is thus almost complete. The process can be reversed only when, and if, a genuine grassroots movement, supported by the progressive sections of society and infused with a consciousness of the dangers inherent in this epistemic assault, is

built up for redeeming India's freedom and re-asserting national sovereignty in policy formulation.

[This paper is essentially based on three chapters of a book being written by this author on education policy in India and methods of policy analysis. The three chapters that were compressed in this paper deal with a) non-formal education; b) Constitutional amendment to purportedly make education a Fundamental Right and c) impact of Structural Adjustment and external aid on education policy. This work is part of author's research as Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.]*

Notes

¹ NPE-1986 was preceded by NPE-1968, the first national policy on education, which was in the form of a Cabinet Resolution adopted by the Parliament.

² The Common School System and the concept of Neighbourhood Schools was recommended by the Education Commission (1964-66); see Sections 1.36-1.38, 10.05, 10.19, 10.20 (GOI, 1966). While recommending a 'phased implementation of the Common School System within a ten year time frame', the Acharya Ramamurti Committee Report stressed the need for 'essential minimum legislation', a common language policy for all schools and a 'combination of incentives, disincentives and legislation' to bring into its fold the recognized but unaided private schools (GOI, 1990, Chapter 4D, pp. 91-93). The concept was further elaborated and enriched by Sadgopal (2000, pp. 153-163; 2002b, 122-124; 2003a, pp. 23-27).

³ The original Article 45 now stands substituted by a modified but diluted Article 21A as a result of the 93rd (now called 86th) Amendment to the Constitution. Compared to the original Article 45, the dilution is a consequence of (a) de-linking Early Childhood Care and Pre-school Education (ECCE) from elementary education, thereby not viewing education of all children 'until they complete the age of fourteen years' as a continuum; (b) withdrawing the Constitutional guarantee for provision of free ECCE; and (c) not including a specific time frame for fulfillment of the commitment.

⁴ Such a harmonious construction of Part IV with Part III of the Constitution was the basis of the historic Unnikrishnan Judgement, giving education of children 'until they complete the age of fourteen years' the status of Fundamental Right (Supreme Court, 1993). In this judgement, Article 45 of Part IV was read in conjunction with Article 21 of Part III.

⁵ It is now widely acknowledged that all those children in the school age who are not in school are to be regarded essentially as child labour, even if they are engaged in domestic chores or outside work-places to help their parents, including sibling care by girl children. This contention has gained credibility as a result of the work of MV Foundation in Ranga Reddy District, Andhra Pradesh, which led to the revealing sociological principle that 'all children out of school are, by definition, child labourers' (Sinha, 2000, p. 168).

⁶ NPE-1986 (Sections 5.14 and 5.15) also gave birth to Navodaya Vidyalayas - a yet another parallel layer but above the formal school. Navodaya Vidyalayas, like non-formal education, also violate the principle of equality in educational planning and allocation of resources but a discussion on this issue is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁷ The Government used the term 'instructors' in order to avoid litigation. It was aware that the under-paid NFE instructors can seek justice in courts by contending that, in comparison to regular teachers, they are being discriminated, as 'unequal pay for equal work' violates the Constitutional principle of right to equality (Ed.CIL report on para-teachers, 2000, p.7).

⁸This author was a member of the 17-member NPE Review Committee-1990 (NPERC) and acted as the Convenor of its Sub-committee on 'Access, Equity and Universalisation.' The Sub-committee examined the policy on NFE and recorded in its deliberations this flawed logic as well as these internal contradictions in much detail. However, the final report included a rather diluted version of these deliberations due to the consideration shown to the hostile opposition to this analysis by the then Secretary, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

⁹A comment is needed on the choice of the term 'non-formalise' in NPERC's recommendations for transforming the formal school system. As the Convenor of NPERC's Sub-committee on 'Access, Equity and Universalisation', this author was under intense pressure from the Ministry not to criticize the NFE component of the policy since it was considered to be Ministry's 'best foot forward' for achieving UEE. There were by then almost 2.4 lakh NFE centres (of these, 78,000 centres were exclusively for girls). A great deal of media hype

had been by then orchestrated, glorifying NFE (as well as adult literacy campaigns) as a panacea for lack of universal access to education (just as it is being done at present for EGS centres and Alternative Schools of DPEP). Being keen to convince the policy makers of the need to focus all political attention on the transformation of the formal school system, the author used the expression 'non-formalisation of the formal school system', implying that the so-called desirable but otherwise non-existent features of NFE need to be in the formal system itself. This 'appeasement' did not work since the policy makers, as we shall see later, had made up their mind neither to transform nor to improve the formal school system, most probably under the influence of Jomtien Declaration and Structural Adjustment Programme.

¹⁰ In July 1991, the newly elected Central Government of Prime Minister Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao (Shri Arjun Singh was the HRD Minister) constituted a committee under the aegis of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) to 'review the implementation of the various parameters of NPE, taking into consideration the report of the Committee for Review of the NPE and other relevant developments since the policy was formulated and to make recommendations regarding modifications to be made in NPE.' This committee, called the CABE Committee on Policy, was chaired by Shri Janardhana Reddy, the Congress Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh. The decision to constitute the CABE Committee to purportedly review the Acharya Ramamurti Committee Report essentially amounted to *not* giving effect to the major policy changes recommended therein. The CABE Committee Report, submitted in January 1992, fulfilled the objective of the Government by rejecting all the significant recommendations of the Acharya Ramamurti Committee for policy changes for promoting equity in elementary education and building up a Common School System. Thus the Government managed to keep doors open for Structural Adjustment in the post-Jomtien phase, as will be shown later in this paper. Accordingly, NPE-1986 was revised by the Parliament in 1992 with only minor modifications.

¹¹ The Jomtien Conference was attended by the representatives of 155 national governments (including Indian government), 20 inter governmental bodies and 150 NGOs.

¹² For instance, a follow-up Education for All Conference of nine high population-level countries was held in New Delhi in 1993. These nine high population-level countries included Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan – collectively referred to as the E-9 countries. This group met recently in Cairo in December 2003.

¹³ As part of the Dakar Framework of Action, UNESCO now regularly monitors the progress made by each nation in the context of the Dakar Goals and issues 'EFA Global Monitoring Report' annually. The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4 focused on the education of the girl child and was issued just before the EFA Conference held at New Delhi on November 10-12, 2003. The reports released in 2002 and 2003/4 show that *India is amongst those countries which are unlikely to fulfill any of the six Dakar Goals* (only three out of six goals were assessed), *including the goal of gender parity, even by the target year of 2015*. The Union Minister of Human Resource Development Dr. Murlis Manohar Joshi took strong exception to this negative assessment in the UNESCO report and claimed that it is based upon outdated data (Hindustan Times, Indian Express & Pioneer, 8th November 2003). However, the Minister's claim was unfounded as shown by this author (Sadgopal, 2003b,c).

¹⁴ Externally aided projects in primary education in Andhra Pradesh (APPD) and Bihar (BEP) preceded the Jomtien Declaration but these were envisaged as special pilot projects, rather than being a matter of policy. The possibility can not be denied that the international funding agencies might have used the Andhra Pradesh and Bihar pilot projects in the pre-Jomtien phase to test the political waters in India i.e. the political will of the ruling elite to stand by its Constitutional obligations and policy. The Indian political leadership obviously failed the test as the externally aided projects of the post-Jomtien phase led to major violations of the Constitution and dilutions of the policy.

¹⁵ The problem is probably inherent in the ambiguous notions of 'Basic Education' and 'Basic Learning Needs' in both the Jomtien and Dakar Frameworks. The ambiguity of these notions, most likely deliberate, is what allows them to be used for merging of 'human needs and market forces', as noted by Tomasevski (2001). A discussion on this issue is beyond the scope of this paper. It would be sufficient to point out here that Jomtien's notion of 'Basic Education' must not be confused with the revolutionary pedagogic concept of Basic Education (or *Buniyadi Shiksha*), as evolved by Mahatma Gandhi at the Wardha Education Conference in 1937 as part of the freedom struggle which was further elaborated by a committee under the chairpersonship of Dr. Zakir Hussain as *Nai Taleem*. The almost servile 'parroting' of the Jomtien's narrow notion of 'Basic Education' by the Indian policy makers in the post-Jomtien official discourse amounts to denial of one of the most inspiring features of the heritage of the freedom struggle, apart from further marginalizing the possibility of integrating the 'world of work' with the 'world of knowledge' as conceived by Mahatma Gandhi.

¹⁶The concept of ‘Basic Education’ in the Jomtien and Dakar Frameworks is limited to primary education of five years only. Elementary education of eight years, implied by the Indian Constitution under the original Article 45 as well as the amended Article 21A as the minimum guarantee by the State, is non-existent in these Frameworks. Interestingly, the Jomtien Framework concedes that ‘these targets represent a “floor” (but not a “ceiling”)’ and parentactically provides for ‘(primary education) or whatever higher level of education is considered as basic’ by a particular country [Sections 5 and 8 (2) respectively]. It is indeed ironic that the Indian policy makers, instead of using these spaces in the Framework for persisting with India’s Constitutional and policy imperatives, allowed the international funding agencies to dilute *elementary* education to *primary* education as the dominant framework for educational planning and financing in the post-Jomtien India.

¹⁷This scheme to accommodate 9-14 age group children in adult literacy classes was announced with great fanfare by the then Prime Minister of India in his inaugural address at the ECA Conference of E-9 countries held at New Delhi in 1993. Such glorification of this policy measure is an evidence of *education being reduced to literacy*.

¹⁸According to ‘Education For All - National Plan of Action’ (GOI, 2003a), the total Tenth Plan requirement for UEE is Rs. 52,280 crores (Centre and State shares combined). This amounted to an average of 0.47% of GDP in 2002-03, including the external aid component. Of the Centre’s share (Rs. 39,760 crores), the Planning Commission promised Rs. 21,271 crores i.e. only 53.5% of Tenth Plan requirement. This leaves a gap of at least Rs. 18,489 crores. The gap in State’s share is not yet reported. Recent press reports indicate that Planning Commission has further reduced its allocation to Rs. 17,000 crores (i.e. mere 0.15% of GDP), thereby increasing the gap. The story does not end here. The Prime Minister made desperate appeals to the international funding agencies at the UNESCO-sponsored ‘Third High Level Group Meeting of EFA’ held in Delhi in November 2003 for increasing external aid for elementary education (Indian Express and Hindustan Times, 11th November 2003); the Minister of Human Resource Development carried forward this appeal at the ‘E-9 Ministerial-level Review Meeting on ECA’ held in Cairo in December 2003 (Rashtriya Sahara, 21st December 2003). The Government of India seems to have got an assurance of additional external aid of Rs. 15,000 crores for the Tenth Plan. However, as per press reports, the Ministry of Finance has ‘asked the HRD Ministry to adjust Rs. 15,000 crores in the original allocation of Rs. 17,000 crores’ (Hindustan Times, 17th December 2003)!

¹⁹In this context, it may be noted that UPA Government’s Common Minimum Programme (CMP) “pledges to raise public spending in education to *at least 6% of GDP with at least half this amount* being spent *on primary and secondary sectors*.” This pledge calls for four comments. *First*, this level of 6% of GDP was to be initially achieved by 1986 but the modified 1986 policy stated that the outlay will “uniformly exceed 6 % of the national income” during “the Eighth Five Year Plan and onwards.” Since then, practically every major political party has promised to do this in its election manifestos in each General Election. The UPA is, therefore, obliged to produce a clear roadmap for *re-prioritisation of national economy* in order to make its pledge credible. *Two*, the UPA needs to be lauded for *at least not diluting* this commitment as the BJP cleverly attempted to do this in its recent manifesto by promising to raise “the *total* spending on education to 6% of GDP by 2010, with *enlarged public-private partnership*.” This substitution of policy-level commitment to public spending by private resources was also a part of the NDA manifesto, clearly in deference to the neo-liberal agenda. *Three*, the CMP has not acknowledged the urgent need to fulfill the *cumulative gap* that has been building up for the past three decades due to *under-investment* in education. For elementary education, this was estimated by the Tapas Majumdar Committee (1999) as being equal to Rs. 13,700 crores per year for the next ten years which amounts to about 0.6% of the current level of GDP (i.e. merely 60 paise out of every Rs. 100 of GDP). The UPA is expected to provide for this additionality, apart from reaching the level of 6% of GDP. A similar estimate of the cumulative gap in secondary and higher education sectors is yet to be made. *Four*, India is already spending almost half of its total educational outlay on elementary education. The UPA’s pledge to spend at least half the total expenditure “*on primary and secondary sectors*” has *negative implications*. This is because, in 1998-99, 78.7% of the total expenditure was on elementary and secondary sectors taken together. The UPA formulation implies that the priority to be given to both of these sectors will be *reduced to merely 50%* of the total expenditure! Hopefully, this is a result of the usual, but still alarming, *misconception about the category of “primary” education* as referred to in the CMP.

²⁰A note may be taken here of the recent order of the High Court of Delhi to the private unaided schools to provide free education to poor children to the extent of 20-25% of their strength as per the terms and conditions of the agreement they signed while receiving free or low cost land. However, the order has only revealed the long-standing collusion between the state authorities (including the political leadership of various parties ruling the state at different times) and the private school lobby which ensured that the said agreement will be flouted unashamedly for years, if not decades. The High Court order is a tribute neither to the Government nor to the

school managements but to Social Juist, a voluntary body, which filed the petition and pursued the matter against all odds.

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The Constitution, National Policies and the International Provisions: Evolving a Critique

by
Dr. Vasudha Dhagamwar

Child Rights to Elementary Education; National and International Provisions¹

Vasudha Dhagamwar²

The last word on education has been spoken many times. Even this year the President has regretted the fact that only 4% of the GDP is spent on education. Yet, the framers of our Constitution had not forgotten the school going child and its right to education. Unfortunately this was not put in Part III which enshrines our fundamental rights. There it would have emerged as a right. Instead it was placed in Part IV, which contains the Directive Principles of State Policy. Perhaps this was done on account of the expenditure involved. The Directive Principles of State Policy are virtually the blue print of a new India. The reader does not need to be reminded that Directive Principles of State Policy are only directives to the state. They are not enforceable in court. This is where they differ from fundamental rights.

Part III of the Constitution spells out our fundamental rights³. These rights cover almost all aspects of our lives. They breathe life into the aspirations and rights of the ordinary people of our country. A most important right is guaranteed by Article 32. It is the right to petition the Supreme Court directly, if any our fundamental rights are violated. Without this right the Constitution would remain a jumble of pretty words. The Supreme Court of India has widened the scope of the right to life to mean right to live with dignity,⁴ even in jail.⁵ The apex court has interpreted life to mean a life with dignity and even interpreted it to mean a right to a living wage⁶. The Supreme Court has done so in response to various petitions. *The fact that the right to elementary education was not included is a reflection on the lack of civil society's petitions for schools*

¹ Paper presented to Council for Social Development, New Delhi

² Executive Director, Multiple Action Research Group, New Delhi

³ Articles 13-35

⁴ *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India* AIR 1984 SC 802

⁵ *Sunil Batra v Delhi Administration* AIR 1980 SC 1579

⁶ *People's Union of Democratic Rights v Union of India* AIR 1982 SC 1473.

But no one may approach the courts for enforcement of any of the Directive Principles of State Policy⁷. In legal terminology, while fundamental rights are justiciable, directive principles are non justiciable. It is up to the government of the day to decide when to act upon them.

Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy deals with the education of children up to the age of 14. It reads:

Provision of free and compulsory education for children:- The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of the Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years

Education was to be *free, compulsory* and *universal*. The Constitution commenced on 26th January 1950, So the grace period ended on Republic Day of 1960. During this period the government was not entirely inactive. On the national and on the international front it did take some action.

International instruments ratified by Government of India

The government became signatory to a number of international instruments which mentioned education as a child's right. The first was the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁸. Article 26 of UDHR laid down that

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be free and compulsory. Technical and secondary education shall be accessible and higher education shall be available on basis of merit.

India is also a signatory to the Convention of the Rights of the Child adopted by UN General Assembly in 1989. India ratified this convention only on 10th December 1992, which is the international Human Rights Day. Principle 7 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child⁹ proclaimed:

The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory at least in the elementary stages. He shall be given an education which promotes his general culture

⁷ Articles 36-51

⁸ U N General Assembly resolution No. 29/28 (III) on 10th December 1948.

⁹ U N General Assembly resolution No.1386(XIV) of 20th November 1989 ratified by India on 10th December 1992

and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgement and his sense of moral and social responsibility and become a useful member of society.

The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities should endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right.

Secondary and higher education was to be made available and accessible to all. It should be noted that the state was not required to make post primary education either compulsory or free.

Article 28 of CRC also asked states to take steps to encourage regular attendance at school and reduce dropout rate.

Article 13(2) of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights also says categorically that primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all and that it is the responsibility of the state parties to achieve this objective. While the UDHR mentioned elementary education, the CRC as well as ICESCR talked of primary education.

None of these instruments however, mentioned any age for commencement of education nor specified an upper age limit.

Successive UN meetings and World Summits formulated resolutions which furthered the aims of UDHR and CRC. In 1990 the World Summit for Children pointed out that 100 million children throughout the world were without basic schooling and out of them 2/3rd were girls. The Summit concluded that provision of basic education and literacy were among the most important contributions that could be made to the development of children throughout the world.

The Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, was ratified by India as late as on 29th June 1993. The Convention only speaks of education in general terms without making any mention of primary education. A Committee was set up to receive reports from state parties on implementation of CEDAW by them. In its first report in 2000, the Committee identified making of primary and secondary education compulsory as one of the goals for state parties¹⁶.

¹⁶ Agenda papers for national workshop on CEDAW, Department of Women and Child HRD Ministry, Govt. of India 2003 p.2.

National Initiatives

Even before independence, primary education in *government* schools had been free. That is, no fees had to be paid, although books and stationary were not free. On the other hand there were fewer books and hardly any stationary. For the first few years children went to school with one slate and one book, this author remembers, during those days. The slate was the writing equipment wiped or smudged and written on over and over again. One book did service for all subjects: it contained stories with a moral, history lessons in the shape of biographies of great men and women, and even the geography of one's town could be taught from it, using prominent landmarks. That one book served to teach reading and spelling. Arithmetic was taught from the blackboard. Much was it was oral learning, through recitation of multiplication tables. Apart from inevitable and frequent breakage of slates there was hardly any expense. Only in class four we were permitted to write with a pencil, but only for exams. There was no uniform. One is aware that uniform has many benefits. For example, it is a great leveler of social inequalities for it prevents open display of wealth. But for children whose parents cannot afford the money it does look like extra expense.

After independence the same practice of providing free primary education in government schools continued. The question has never been of charging fees in government schools. It has been of making it available to all and of making it compulsory. In the old Bombay province, The Bombay Education Act 1923 had also made it compulsory. It provided for a fine of five and half rupees on guardians for not sending the child to school. In Baroda state Sayaji Rao Gaikwar had also made it compulsory. An old woman, who was a in domestic service, told this author that the school peon would call at the home of the absent child to ask why she or he was not in school. Perhaps the princely states of Mysore and Aundh had similar policies. After the princely states merged into Indian Union, this rule fell into abeyance. The old woman from Baroda was literate; her granddaughter was not. Such is the power of compulsion until sending children to school becomes second nature.

The question then as now is not of making primary education free: it is of making it universal and compulsory. It is also of making it good quality. If for the first the government is responsible, the civil society is responsible for eroding the quality of government schools. Over the last three generations we have steadily withdrawn from the state schools. Any one, who can afford it, sends the children to private schools. But for university education we return to the state. By that time the competition our children face in schools is all but over. But state schools have become

synonymous with low quality education, for only poor people. Even those as we shall see are preferred over Non Formal Education centres.

To go back to the legal scenario, the Constitution divides the responsibility for a given subject into three groups. The subjects that devolve on the government of India are on the union list. There are others which are on the state list. The third list is of items on which both state and central governments can legislate, with Central legislation having priority over that of the state. Residual subjects belong to central government.

Some central universities such as the universities of Delhi, Aligarh and Benares were on the union list. Institutions imparting technical education of excellence could also be added to that list. That is how the Indian Institutes of Technology and Indian Institutes of Management, which came into existence much later, found themselves placed in the union list. Other tertiary or higher educational institutions were on the concurrent list. School education was on the state list. This arrangement in itself tells us volumes about the importance given to school education. In 1977, by the forty second amendment all education was transferred to the concurrent list. However the items on union list were still left untouched.

From the beginning, even while schools were a state subject, the education ministry of the central government had some responsibility for schools. The government of India allocated some funds from central budget were allocated for schools as well as for free ships to SC and ST children and girls from almost all classes. Both state and central governments crafted their own laws for primary education.

Education Committees

The government of India also appointed several committees to look into the status of primary education and make their reports on the subject. Two such early reports were by eminent educationists, notably, DS Kothari¹¹ and JP Naik¹². Between Kothari, Naik we can get a fair idea about the state of primary education for the first three quarters of in the 20th century. Vimla Ramachandran completes the picture with information on the last two decades.

The numbers for children in school from 1950 to 1974 are given by Naik Committee¹³. Naik Committee seems to have found reason to be sanguine. By 1950-51 the enrollment children in

¹¹ DS Kothari *Education and National Development, Report of the Education Commission 1964-66* GOI 1971

¹² JP Naik *Elementary Education in India* ICSSR 1975

¹³ JP Naik op.cit p.9 for figures from 1950-51 till 1973-74

primary school had certainly increased. At that time 9.2 million 6 to 11 year old children were enrolled in class 1 to 5. Of them 13.8 million were boys and 5.4 were girls. The girls were about 39% of boys in school. In terms of percentages to total population, as many as 60.8% boys in the 6 to 11 year age group were in primary school. However, only 24.9% girls and 42.6% of the total number of children between 6 to 11 were with them. *At no time does the sex ratio account demographically for the low school enrollment of 6 to 11 year old girls. Such figures also disprove any theory that gives poverty as the reason for not sending children to school.*

Even this low figure slumped for children between 12 to 14 years of age. In absolute numbers only 3.1 million children were enrolled in classes 6 to 8 or upper primary school. Of them 2.6 million were boys and girls were only .5 million or 5 lakhs in the entire country. In terms of percentages to the total population of children between 12 to 14 years of age, only 12.9% children in this age group were in school. Of them a mere 4.3% were girls. Boys accounted for 20.8 % of the children in upper primary school.

By 1955 enrollment of 6 to 9 year olds had crossed the 50% mark (52.8%) for children of their age group. The number of girls had also gone up. Nearly 1/3rd the total number of girls were in school (32.8%). As usual, boys far exceeded the girls. 72.0 % boys or nearly 3/4th the total number of boys were going to primary school.

In 1960 61 82.6% boys and 62.4% children of 6 to 11 years were in primary school. In 1961 the figure of children in primary school had almost doubled and 35.0 million children were in classes 1 to 5. Of them 23.6 million were boys, an increase of 10 million in a decade. The figure for girls had doubled to 11.4 million. Now the girls in school were just under half the number of boys or about 48%. In terms of percentages, we are told that 82.6% of the boys, 41.4% girls or 32.8% of the girls and 62.4% of all children from 6 to 11 years of age were enrolled in classes one to five.

But the same sad story was repeated in upper primary school. There were still only 6.7 million children in classes 6 to 8, although admittedly it was double the number from 1951. Of them a mere 1.6 million were girls. As many as 5.1 million were boys, in itself a very low figure. In terms of percentages the figures are 32.0% boys, 11.3% girls and 22.5% of the total 12 to 14 year old children were in upper primary school. In 1965 6 the figures rose to show that 96.3% boys, 56.5% girls and 76. % of total children were in primary school.

Naik Committee found that in 1968-69 of 6 to 11 year olds, 95.6% boys and 59.6% girls were in lower primary school. The total came to 78.1%, (32.2 million boys, 20.2 million girls and total

54.4 million children). But of 12 to 14 year olds, only 33.5% were in upper primary school. Of them 47% were boys and only 19.3% were girls, a huge gap. (9 million boys, 3.5 million girls, total 12.5 million)

This upward trend continued and Naik Committee records that in 1974 the enrollment of boys in classes 1 to 5 had reached 100% and 66% girls were similarly in school. 84.0 % of the total children between 6 to 11 years of age were in primary school. In absolute numbers 39.4 million boys, 24.4 million girls and a total of 63.8 million children were going to primary school. The gap between girls and boys had narrowed further.

The enrollment in *upper* primary school continued to be low, although the numbers had risen. 10.5 million boys, 4.5 million girls and a total of 15.0 million children were in classes 6 to 8. But only 48% boys 22 % girls and 36% of the children who should have been upper primary schools who were actually there. It also meant that girls were still less than half the number of boys.

The data undoubtedly shows that Class 1 to 8 enrollment has been increasing steadily during the century. But the gap remains more or less the same. If we draw a chart, the line of enrollment to class 6 to 8 over a given period will rise every year. But it will also be nearly parallel – and below that for class 1 to 5. *This would look as if the target would now have to be to increase all children in upper primary school and of girls throughout primary school.*

This not the only problem. Naik Committee talked only of children in primary and upper primary schools without breaking down the data any further. The older Kothari report had analyzed the data *within* the primary school. It noted that even in the age group of 6 to 11 there were wide variations. The number of children in school peaked at the age of 6 to 7 years of age; then it began to fall and went on falling.

Even in 1911-12, 20.6% of the 5 to 6 year olds were in school. Their number peaked to show as many as 24.6% children between 6 to 7 years of age were in school. But it fell to only 21.2% for 7 to 8 year olds and it went on falling. Of the 8 to 9 year olds only 11.8% were in school in 1911-12.

Even in 1950-51 the same bell curve obtained. From 19.9% for children who were 5-6 year old it rose to 32.1% for 6-7 year olds and then fell to 25.7% for 7-8 year olds. Then – it fell even more steeply, to 12.5% for 8-9 year old children

In 1961-62 the story was the same. Only 18.4 % of 5 to 6 year olds went to school. The figure rose for 6 to 7 year olds to 31.7%, and then fell to 25.7% for 7 to 8 year olds. It was just 12.5% of the 8 to 9 year old children. One can guess the figures would be even lower for girls.

The figures tell us that the largest number of school attendees were 6-7 year old.

From Vimala Ramachandran's data we can locate figures for 1981 and 1991. Ramachandran adds two other factors in addition to enrollment data: actual attendance and acquisition of literacy. Here we discover that half the children who are enrolled drop out of school. The drop out rate is so high that one cannot draw any comfort from the increasing enrollment figures. Even fewer children report that they are literate. *So even all the children who do stay on are not literate.* As may be expected, more girls than boys in any category will drop out of school.

Table 1. Percentage of children enrolled in school (6-10 years)¹⁴

Enrolled		Reported as literate		Attending school					
1981									
All Areas									
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls				
95.8	64.1	38.1	27.9	50.6	31.4				
Rural									
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls				
NA	NA	33.2	21.6	38.3	25.1				
1991									
All Areas									
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls				
112.8	86.9	65.2	51.9	50.6	45.4				
Rural									
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls				
98.6	81.8	60.3	44.8	52.3	39.3				

So now we look at another requirement: all children must go to school, they must stay there and they must be taught what they are supposed to learn. They must then continue in the upper primary school. But at each stage we find that it does not happen.

We also run into another statistical riddle. In 1973-74 100% boys were shown to be enrolled in primary school. This in itself stretches the bounds of our ability to suspend disbelief. The figure is simply not credible. But there is more to come. From 1979 onwards from time to time the data shows that more than 100% boys in the age group of 6-10 as being enrolled in classes 1-5. As

¹⁴ Vimala Ramachandran (Ed.) *Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education* SAGE, New Delhi 2004 p.54

many as 118% boys were shown to be enrolled in primary school in 1991. Common sense rebels at this statement. How can this possibly be?

The answer is that the children over 11 years of age, who have joined in primary school are also counted in the age group of 6 to 11 years of age. This in turn means that even when the data showed less than 100% children, a part of that number belonged to upper primary school. Many 6-11 year old children who should have been in school are not even enrolled. Secondly the need of older children for bridge courses is kept concealed.

What applies to boys will of course be true of girls, although experience dictates that girls who were kept back at a younger age, are even less likely to be sent to school when they are older.

The problem of high rate of drop outs and low rate of acquired literacy skills is even more acute for the SC and ST children. The comments about the problem of older children in primary classes apply to them are even more true of them.

Table 2. All Children Attending Schools by Sex and Caste in 1981 and 1991 Censuses¹⁵

All India Rural Males	Sch. Castes	Sch. Tribes	All Population
1981	41.6	35.3	50.6
1991	---	---	52.3
All India Rural Females			
1981	20.5	17.3	31.4
1991	---	---	39.3

Here we see that ST children lag even further behind SC children. Fewer schools distance from urban habitations, language difficulties may be some of the reasons for which they are not in school. As usual girls suffer even more, data is not even available for them on 1991.

As we have seen, the situation was pretty bad in 1950. Instead of tackling the problem head on, beginning from 1950s the government launched a number of adult literacy programmes. Adult literacy was fine, but it should not have competed for scarce resources with children's education. *Most important, this programme was not even distantly related with the directive of Art. 45*

This gap or lack of connection was unwittingly underlined by a young rural housewife way back in 1950s when she asked a social worker trying to enroll her in one such class¹⁶. The busy mother

¹⁵ Vimala Ramachandran (Ed.) *Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education* SAGE, New Delhi 2004 p.56

¹⁶ Expediency of Smt Geeta Sane, narrated in a Marathi article on primary education; reference not available.

wanted her children to be taken to school instead of her. But said the social worker, the school was not for children. In all innocence she asked, 'Will my boys become men like this, and then will you take them to your school?'

Since the last quarter of 20th century a new model has found favour with the government. It is of non formal, part time education. Both models assumed that poor children would not be able to stop working, that poor families could not afford full time education for their children, particularly for girls. Either they learnt in part time schools or they grew up to attend adult literacy classes. None of these programmes had achieved the goal of Article 45, really made all children literate or put them into schools.

Supreme Court judgements on primary education

The problem came to a head in 1990s. In 1991 a young woman named Mohini Jain was asked to pay capitation fees in a medical college in a private medical college in Karnataka. She filed a writ petition before the Supreme Court saying that this infringed her right to life, which had been long interpreted as right to live with dignity. This case was *Mohini Jain v. The State of Karnataka*.¹⁷ The Supreme Court accepted the argument and declared that higher education was a fundamental right. Please remember, such a right is neither enjoined by the DPSP nor by the numerous UN Conventions India have signed. Higher education has to be made available within the economic capacity of the state; it need not be even cheap, leave alone free.

Soon thereafter, the subject matter was mentioned in Supreme Court in another petition. In 1993 in the justly celebrated case of *Unni Krishnam v. The State of Andhra Pradesh*¹⁸ the Supreme Court of India finally held that the right to education up to the age of 14 years was a fundamental right. The Court argued that this right flowed from Article 21, which guaranteed the fundamental right to life. In 1950 the Constitution had set a time limit of ten years in which the right was to be given effect. But, as this goal had not been met, 'we should think that the Court should step in'. That is what the Court did; they declared that every child had a right to free education till the age of 14 years. Forty five years had passed since the Constitution had become the supreme law of the land - the government also struck down *Mohini Jain*.

In his long judgement Justice Jeevan Reddy referred to distinguished educationists such as D.S. Kothari and J.P. Naik and also to the noted scholar Gunnar Myrdal.

We quote

¹⁷ 1992 (5) SLR 1 (SC)

Higher education calls heavily on national economic resources. The right to it must necessarily be limited in any given country by its economic and social circumstances. The State's obligation to provide it is, therefore, not absolute and immediate but relative and progressive... by holding education as a fundamental right upto the age of 14 years this Court is not determining the priorities. On the contrary, reminding it of the solemn endeavour, it has to take, under Article 45, within a prescribed time, which time limit has expired long ago.

Later the Court said,

It is noteworthy that among the several articles in part IV, only Article 45 speaks of a time-limit; no other article does. Has it no significance? Is it a mere pious wish even after 44 years of the Constitution? Can the State flout the said direction even after 44 years on the ground that the article merely calls upon it to "endeavour to provide" the same and on the further ground that the said article is not enforceable by virtue of the declaration in Article 37. Does not the passage of 44 years - more than four times the period stipulated in Article 45 - convert the obligation created by the article into an enforceable right? In this context, we feel constrained to say that allocation of available funds to different sectors of education in India discloses an inversion of priorities indicated by the Constitution. The Constitution contemplated a crash programme being undertaken by the State to achieve the goal set out in Article 45. It is relevant to notice that Article 45 does not speak of the "limits of its economic capacity and development" as does Article 41, which inter alia speaks of right to education¹⁸. What has actually happened is more money is spent and more attention is directed to higher education than to - and at the cost of primary education. By primary education, we mean the education, which a normal child receives by the time he completes 14 years of age. Neglected more so are the rural sectors, and the weaker sections of the society referred to in Article 46¹⁹.

The Court noted that this 'inversion of priorities' has been commented upon adversely by both the educationists and economists. Thus Gunnar Myrdal observed 'in his *Asian Drama*²¹

"Although the declared purpose was to give priority to the increase of elementary schooling in order to raise the rate of literacy in the population, what has actually

¹⁸ AIR 1993 SC 2178

¹⁹ But that was within the economic capacity of the state and coupled with the right to work.

²⁰ Article 46 was about the educational and economic rights of the SC and ST communities

²¹ Gunnar Myrdal *Asian Drama* abridged edition 1972 p335

i happened is that secondary schooling has been rising much faster and tertiary schooling has increased still more rapidly. *There is a fairly general tendency for planned targets of increased primary schooling not to be not reached, whereas targets are over reached, sometimes substantially, as regards increase in secondary and particularly, tertiary schooling. This has all happened in spite of the fact that secondary schooling seems to be three to five times more expensive than primary schooling, and schooling at the tertiary level, five to seven times more expensive than at the secondary level.*

What we see functioning here is the distortion of development from planned targets under the influence of the pressure from parents and pupils in the upper strata who everywhere are politically powerful. Even more remarkable is the fact that this tendency to distortion from the point of view of the planning objectives is more accentuated in the poorest countries, Pakistan, India, Burma and Indonesia, which started out with far fewer children in primary schools and which should therefore have the strongest reasons to carry out the programme of giving primary schooling the highest priority. It is generally the poorest countries that are spending least, even relatively on primary education, and that are permitting the largest distortions from the planned targets in favour of secondary and tertiary education". (emphasis added)

The Supreme Court also cited the opinion of Shri J.P. Naik, the renowned educationist, 'whose report of the Education Commission, 1966 is still considered to be the most authoritative study of education scene in India ' that "Educational development ... is benefiting the "haves" more than the "have-nots".

The Court pointed out that in "Challenge of Education - a Policy Perspective" a publication of the Ministry of Education - dated 1985, it was stated that:

"Considering the constitutional imperative regarding the universalisation of elementary education it was to be expected that the share of this sector would be protected from attrition. Facts, however, point in the opposite direction. *From a share of 56 per cent in the First Plan, it declined to 35 per cent in the Second Plan, to 34 per cent in the Third Plan, to 30 per cent in the Fourth Plan. It started going up again only in the Fifth Plan, when it was at the level of 32 per cent, increasing in Sixth Plan to 36 per cent, still 20 per cent below the First Plan level. On the other hand, between the First and the Sixth Five Year Plans, the share of university education went up from 9 per cent to 16 per cent."*

The Court then added

Be that as it may, we must say that at least now the State should honour the command of Article 42. It must be made a reality - at least now. *Indeed, the 'National Education Policy - 1986' says that the promise of Article 45 will be redeemed before the end of this century. Be that as it may we hold that a child (citizen) has a fundamental right to free education upto the age of 14 years.'*

This does not however mean that this obligation can be performed only through the State schools. It can also be done by permitting, recognising and aiding voluntary non-governmental organisations, who are prepared to impart free education to children. This does not also mean that unaided private schools cannot continue. They can, indeed, that too have a role to play. They meet the demand of that segment of population who may not wish to have their children educated in State-run schools. They have necessarily to charge fees from the students. In this judgment, however, we do not wish to say anything about such schools....

Before proceeding further, we think it right to say this: We are aware that "Education is the second highest sector of budgeted expenditure after the defence. A little more than three per cent of the Gross National Product is spent in education", as pointed out in para 2.31 of 'Challenge of Education'. But this very publication says that "in comparison to many countries, India spends much less on education in terms of the proportion of Gross National Product" and further "in spite of the fact that educational expenditure continues to be the highest item of expenditure next only to Defence the resource gap for educational needs is one of the major problems. Most of the current expenditure is only in the form of salary payment. It hardly needs to be stated that additional capital expenditure would greatly augment teacher productivity because in the absence of expenditure on other heads even the utilisation of staff remains low" we do realise that ultimately it is a question of resources and resources wise this country is not in a happy position. All we are saying is that while allocating the available resources, due regard should be had to the wise words of Founding Fathers in Articles 45 and 46. Not that we are not aware of the importance and significance of higher education. What may perhaps be required is a proper balancing of the various sectors of education.

This was a hard hitting, well reasoned landmark judgment. The judges knew all the facts all the arguments and dealt with them. Now the need of the hour was an action on all fronts by government, civil society and NGOs. A spate of writ petitions invoking *Lungi Krishnan* would have done the trick. But there was total silence. Despite the Court holding out a promise before them no one forward to take advantage of it. Indeed, speaking to a group of lawyers and judges seven years later, in 2001, the then chief justice of India wondered aloud what would have

happened if thousands of petitions had flooded the court. We shall never know. But one thing was made clear by another judgement dated 1997. Child labour was still consuming our school going children. This judgement was given in another Public Interest Litigation

AK Mehta v. The State of Tamil Nadu

The plight of the children working in Sava Kasi (Framework) factories has been known since 1970 when a bus carrying children who were virtually toddlers to the factories fell into a dry river bed killing most of them. This petition arose over the situation of the same children in their judgment the Supreme Court highlighted data about child labour throughout India. In its judgment the Court noted the following statistics.

In 1971 census, out of the children between the ages of 5 to 14 years 10.7 million or 4.68% were child labourers. These figures may not include girls, who mostly work at home without any wages. In 1973 the NSS 27th round gave the figure of 16.3 million child workers. 1981 census gave 11.16 million child workers. In 1983 the Planning Commission said that 17.36 million children between the ages of 5 to 10 years were child workers. It also mentioned 15.70 million children between the ages of 10 to 14 were child workers. 1985 NSS showed 17.58 million children workers. NGO assessment for child labourers ranges from 10 to 100 million children.

In their judgment the Supreme Court said:

Our Constitution makers, wise and sagacious as they were had known that India of their vision would not be a reality if the children of the country are nurtured and educated. For this, their exploitation by different profit makers for their personal gain had to be first indicated. It is this need, which has found manifestation in Article 24, which is one of the two provisions in part IV of our Constitution on the fundamental right against exploitation. *The framers were aware that this prohibition alone would not permit the child to contribute its mite to the nation building work unless it receives at least basic education. Article 45 was therefore inserted in our paramount parchment vesting a duty on the state to endeavour to provide free and compulsory education to children (it is known that this provision in Part IV of our Constitution, after the decision by a Constitution Bench of this Court in Unni Krishnan, 1993 I SCC 645 has acquired the status of a fundamental right).*

This is the other link which we have been ignoring: the existence of child labour opposes and denies all possibility of universal primary education. Conversely if free and compulsory

education is implemented, then child labour will be eradicated in no time at all. Myron Wiener has noted that no country has successfully ended child labour without first making education compulsory²³.

Despite such landmark judgement children still remain out of school. In 2002 the government finally amended the Constitution²⁴ to insert article 21A. It reads

Article 21 A. the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law decide

There has not been a single writ petition filed after this momentous amendment. Unless that happens we shall not find out what kind of education the state may decide to give for we do not know what the following words mean: *in such manner as the state may by law determine*. One thing however is sure. Article 45 had only spoken about children up to the age of 14 years. Article 21A specifies a lower age limit of 6 years. Now the state cannot be compelled to look after children from 0 to 6 years. This looks as though pre primary education could be at the discretion of the state, unless political compulsions dictate otherwise. That in turn will depend on the voters being alert, aware and vigilant.

In the meanwhile let us go back to our unanswered questions about children not completing school. Admittedly, there has been increased activity in the area of elementary education since 1980s. As Ramachandran's data shows .But this good news is followed by bad news; which is that the high dropout rate is high and the rate of learning basic skills of literacy is low. This could be one of the reasons: the children do not learn anything. For them and their parents school is not a good use of time.

²³ AIR 1997 SC 699

²⁴ Myron Wiener *India's Case against compulsory Education* Seminar 413 January New Delhi 1994 pp. 83-86

²⁴ Eighty sixth Amendment to the Constitution 2002

Table 3. Percentage of children enrolled in school (6-10 years)²³

Enrolled 1981 & 1991 given above		Reported as literate 1992-93 NFHS-I		Attending sc 100 1992-93 NFHS-I	
All Areas					
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
113.1	92.7	64	53.6	75	45.4
Rural					
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
NA	NA	60.3	44.8	52.3	39.3
1993-94 NSS 50 th round					
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
115.3	92.9	68.2	62.1	75	61.3
Rural					
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
NA	NA	60.1	50.2	66.4	56
1995-96 NSS 52nd round					
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
98.6	88	--	--	73.0	63.0
Rural					
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
NA	NA	--	--	71.0	58.0
1998-99 NFHS-II					
All Areas					
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
---	---	72.1	67.4	85.2	78.3
Rural					
Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
---	---	70.0	63.6	83.2	75.1

From this data it appears that 75% rural girls attend primary school and 63.6 % are literate. The enrollment figures are not available but they will be higher. We have no segregated data for SC and ST children.

A recent figure from the Government website on education says that : 142 mill children or 82 % children were enrolled in primary school in 2002. But the Select Educational Statistics also revealed that in 2002 as many as 59 million children in 6-14 year group were still out of

²³ Vimala Ramachandran (Ed.) *Gender and Social Equity in Primary Education* op. Cit. In. 15

school.²⁶ How many stayed on? How many learnt anything? We can only guess. But there are some indicators. For example, Vimala Ramachandran tells us that there are regional variations.

Table 4. Some State wise Variations in attendance in Primary School

State	% of Attendance in Primary School
Himachal Pradesh	90
Kerala	90
Bihar	less than 60

It comes as no surprise that Ramachandran found that in higher classes everywhere fewer girls attend school, and that this is so almost all over the country not just in MP, UP, Bihar and Rajasthan, but also in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka; this was particularly the case in urban slums, tribal areas, and in habitations of lower social strata.

Table 5. Some State wise Variations in completion of Primary School by enrolled children

State	% Completing Primary School
Kerala	100%
TN	86
Maharashtra	82
Bihar	28
Rajasthan	30
West Bengal	26

Another fact Ramachandran noted was that children do not seem to learn anything. This is especially true of rural, one or two teacher schools. Teaching may be for as few as 140 days in a year, and it may be for as little as 25 minutes in day! In Karnataka, Rajasthan, UP, Andhra Pradesh schools children in class 3 and 4 were not able to read fluently. 'He cannot read a post card' complained one father in UP.

George Orwell gave us the slogan 'All animals are equal, some animals are more equal than others'. Similarly some government schools are better than others. There are different levels of municipal schools or govt. schools. Some are very good like central schools (kendriya vidyalaya) or army schools. Navayug/ NDMC schools in New Delhi are also good. Class III and IV government servants particularly send their children to these schools. Children of class II and I will go to successively more expensive schools. In rural schools the teacher student ratio is high

²⁶ Vimala Ramachandran *The Best of Times The Worst of Times* Seminar, 536 April 2004 pp.14-17

the building is dilapidated and the equipment is poor or non-existent. In many schools there is not enough space for children to sit. In one school in UP the head master told this author that he could accommodate the children because a certain percentage remained absent every day. But as children from CREDA's bridge courses²⁷ came every day there was a problem!

Scholars and NGOs have noticed a great hunger for education. That is why Ramachandran calls it The Best of Times. There is a great hunger for education. It has led to a virtual mushrooming of private schools in educationally backward areas of Bihar and UP to make up for poor quality government schools or no schools. Even the poor try to find money for their child's education. We in MARG also found this to be true in Ferozabad district of UP. But the really poor cannot afford those schools.

Till a few decades ago education was free or nearly so, whether it was the schools were run by govt. or by private agencies. The latter included Ramakrishna mission schools, Dayananda Anglo Vedic or DAV schools, church schools, private schools by educationists like Dr. Karve and Karmaveer Bhau Saundre in western Maharashtra and by innumerable regional and even local educational trusts and societies. They charged little by way of fees. One thirty five year old said that her primary school in Ludhiana charged only ten paise every month. Education has become a lucrative business since then. It is another indicator of the hunger for good education.

Children do not stay in school because they do not find it interesting. The schools have no buildings, teachers, equipment, books. Operation Blackboard had to be launched in 1987 to provide at least two teachers and some equipment to schools! The children leave or their guardians withdraw them because they learn nothing. There is not enough money in the budget to give them education in the schools.

There are not enough teachers.

Both MVF in Andhra Pradesh and CREDA in Uttar Pradesh two NGOs who run bridge courses for child labour, have started providing volunteer teachers to the government schools in their vicinity. That is the only way their children can get some teaching. Many schools rely upon their help to conduct classes. The state governments do not employ sufficient number of teachers. There are not even two teachers in many schools. Even with two teachers, four classes cannot be handled with any success. In Mirzapur, UP one headmaster also said that the CREDA staff had no other duties, which occupied his teachers. They were busy on various duties from census to polio

²⁷ CREDA report for UNDP 2003 (unpublished).

eradication campaign. The headmasters also asked CREDA for equipment such as the duty strips on children had to sit.

After the 5th Pay Commission in early 1990s the impact on teaching profession has been shatteringly adverse. All government servants were meant to gain from large income hikes. Government administrative staff from class I to IV has certainly gained. Their salary bills have skyrocketed. No government can dare to displease its administrative staff. But what of the teachers? Did they benefit? It does not seem to be the case.

In at least three states as widely separated by distance and social advancement as Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, this author learnt that the recruitment of full time teachers has been badly affected if not halted altogether. The district education officer in one district of UP said quite frankly that the government could not afford the high salaries that would have to be paid to teachers. This was when a head master retired at Rs. 10,000 a month. Instead the government would employ part time teachers who would be called glorified as Shiksha Mitra para teachers or some such name. They would be engaged at Rs 2500 only and they would be dismissed every summer vacation. A school would have one or two such part timers. The DEO did not deny that this arrangement would give the Head Master unfair control over the teachers who would be recruited if he recommended them. From experience one can tell how the position could be used; it could be demands for free goods and services. It could be also be share in the salary. Teachers would be called Acharyas in Education Guarantee Scheme. They would be paid a fixed salary of Rs 1000. CREDA pays its teachers Rs. 1300. Per month while MVE pays less.

When Shri Naik suggested hiring voluntary teachers to reduce the cost of teachers salaries, he surely did not envisage that the increased burden of 5th pay commission would actually cut down the number of regular teachers.

The non mystery of the missing children in Upper Primary School

Another question we ask is about the large number of children who never enroll in Upper Primary School after class V. This reminds one of a story. A boy in the nursery class was colouring all his pictures black. A meeting with his teacher and parents was called to discuss his psychological problems. Suddenly some one thought of asking the child. He said that he had finished all the other colours in his paint box. *Children do not go to upper primary school because they do not have access to one.*

In 1993 in *Uttam Krishnan* the Supreme Court quoted the following figures

Table 6. Number of Institutions

	Primary Schools (Class I-V)	Upper Primary School	Total
1950-51	210558	13146	223704
1990-91	5381636	361059	6242695

By 1990 the ratio had improved infinitesimally. Children from 14.9 primary schools had to compete for places in one Upper Primary School.

In 2002, as we saw, there were 1.92 million children in school, although 5.6 million children were still out of school. For them there were 664 thousand primary schools,²⁸ not much of an increase. There were also 219 thousand upper primary schools and 139 thousand high schools.²⁹ This is steep increase over 1991 but is it enough? These figures mean that – for children from *three* primary schools one Upper Primary School is provided. Students from 3 Upper Primary Schools are supposed to be accommodated by 1.6 High Schools. That is to say, for students of 5 primary schools there is but one High school. The figure would be even lower for higher secondary school, except for one fact – many rural children do not pass class ten exam. It is too tough, too urban child oriented. The headmaster of a higher secondary school in UP said he had enough seats vacant in class 11 as hardly anyone passed class ten. This author also remembers a poor student in tribal Maharashtra who said that as no one in the entire taluka had passed he could get no class ten second hand books.

In government planning there is still no expectation that children will complete elementary education.

Upper primary schools also contain primary schools similarly a high school already has its own primary, upper primary and secondary school sections. The headmasters of high schools in Mirzapur district said they give preference to their own students. Only if they have some spare seats left do they take outsiders. Indeed this is the practice everywhere, even of elite schools. In most fee charging schools the school goes from nursery to class 12. Admission in between is very difficult if not impossible. Parents may prefer a local nursery school for their three year old ; but they are obliged to send them long distances to the school where they would like the child to go when she is older. Family relocating to another city has a very difficult time getting admission for the children who have already started school.

²⁸ Vinoba Ramachandran *Best Times* Seminar op.cit

²⁹ Vinoba Ramachandran *The Best of Times* Seminar op.cit

If the child is in a school going up all the way to high school it is more likely to continue than if it has to change schools. Secondly the change is a psychological time for family decisions. If the child is first generation school goer and if it is a girl then other questions also come up.

Budget allocation

The world moves round money. So one must ask, what is the budget allocation for elementary education? There are various sources for this answer. In this paper we look at this aspect only briefly. In 1975 JP Naik had said that universal education would cost the state 3% of the GNP³⁰. At that time he conceded that it was prohibitively high and he had suggested some alternatives, which we shall mention later.

In Unni Krishnan Supreme Court had pointed out that allocation for education had lost its priorities. More was spent on successive higher stages of education. Elementary education got the smallest portion of the cake. Yet, according to Article 41 as well as according to UN Instruments higher education is to be made available only within the economic capacities of the government. For primary education there was no such condition.

In its website³¹ the education ministry records that the goal as stated in the resolution on the National Policy for Education (NPE) in 1968 was that 6% of total National Income should be set aside for education. The goal was to be attained gradually. *What is the definition of gradual?* In 1951-52 it was 0.8 of GNP and in 1992-93 it rose to 3.3% of GNP. By 8th plan it was to have been 6%. We are now in 10th Plan. In 2004 it is 4% of GNP. In 1975 3% would have been enough but it was considered too high a call on National Income. From 1990-1991 to 1998-1999 on an average 13.6% of the expenditure on elementary education was funded by external aid. 85% of the cost of District Primary Education Programme is raised through external loans.³²

Schemes and Programmes

1980s and 1990s saw a marked increase in governmental efforts to promote primary education. One of the oldest programmes is the Non formal education or NFE programme which was started in 1979-80 'to support full time schooling'. It worked in 10 states. The government has honoured the NFE as its flagship programme for universalizing elementary education. Since then it has made its appearance in various guises. The GOI website says without any self consciousness,

³⁰ JP Naik op cit pp69-70

³¹ Government of India/education .org

³² Haq: Centre for Child Rights, *Elementary Education, India's Children and the Union Budget* Haq New Delhi, 2001 p.31

that the resolution on The National Policy on Education (NPE) was dated 1968 and NPE was formulated in 1986. NPE also recognized that:

School could not reach all children. A large and systematic programme of non formal education would be required for school dropouts, for children from habitations without schools, working children, and girls who could not attend day schools.

The Plan of Action on NPE was prepared only in 1992. All this is an indication of how seriously elementary education is being taken by the government. Secondly the government could not bring itself to give up its obsession with part time schooling, which would of course be for the poor children. The POA strengthened the NPE. According to the government statement, the NPE was 'a plan of action by which every child would regularly attend school or NFE centre'. In one and the same breath the government statement mentioned the two options. Clearly the government was no mind to give unrelenting priority to formal full time schools.

The systematic programmes of non formal education are not one but many. They are called variously, DPEP, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Education Guarantee Scheme, Alternative and Innovative Education, NPEGEL and so on. This is essentially because Government of India and state governments of every ideological persuasion are still not able to make up their minds on continuation of child labour. 'We don't like it on principle but in practice what can we do?' seems to be the official way of thinking.

Way back in 1975 Professor Naik had suggested some alternatives, to avoid heavy spending on formal elementary education. His suggestions were, increase teacher pupil ratio, introduce two shift schools, give books to be used in class only and then circulate them to other children, Get voluntary teachers and finally permit multiple entry points that is, allow older children to enter higher classes directly², through what we will now call bridge courses. After more than a quarter of a century, we are no nearer to our objective. NFE was revised and extended in 1987-88, to include urban slums, hilly, tribal and desert areas. One wonders ho they had been left out the first time. It no also included working children in other Union Territories.

In 1994 the government introduced the District Primary Education Programme with much fanfare. This programme was described as 'a beachhead for overhauling primary education in India'. Yet it suffered from the same suffered from the same fatal flaw. The GOI website for elementary education tells us that 'the basic objectives of DPEP was to provide all children with access to primary education either in the formal system or through the informal education

² J P Naik op cit pp. 69-70

(NFE) programme'. In 1995 the government launched the national programme of nutritional support primary education better known as the mid day meal scheme. However, this was not available to NFE schools.

Then we come to the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* or SSA which was launched in this century. It is mentioned by the GOI as its 'flagship programme for achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education in a time bound manner' as mandated by the 86th amendment¹⁴ which had made primary education a fundamental right. This statement mentions that *19.2 million* children have to be in school in 1.1 million habitations.

The SSA was to strengthen the existing schools by providing drinking water, toilets, teachers even buildings, it would upgrade existing teachers by giving them extensive training. It had a special focus on girls and children with special needs. The objectives of SA spell out the nitty gritty. The very first one is: *All children in school, Education Guarantee Centre, Alternative School or Back to School Camp by 2003*. Except the first one, all are NFE options.

Through this programme the government aimed to have all children to complete five years of schooling by 2007 and eight years elementary schooling by 2010. The deadline has already been extended to 2015.¹⁵

In addition to SSA the government introduced the NPEGEL or National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level. It is not school but level. Even the pretense of sending children to school is dropped. The Education Guarantee Scheme and the Alternate and Innovative education were both meant for out of school children. The SSA made one addition; it aspires to decentralize education and give greater say to states, and to smaller units right up to Village Education Councils in management. By 2003 NFE had been extended to 25 states, working with state governments and over 800 voluntary agencies. The government data say that NFE had 1.38 lakh primary schools and 6800 upper primary centres. A total of 74 lakh children were covered. In other words, 74 lakh children, at least, were still out of formal school.

The government's own evaluation of Alternative and Innovative Education has been discouraging. The report found that alternate education was popularly regarded as inferior education. Completion rates for primary schools were poor. Very few children entered formal school. The programme was not successful with girls. Lastly, the community participation was low. Administration was not flexible or decentralized. There were delays in releasing funds. In

¹⁴ *The Problem Seminar* 536 April 2004 p12

other words the government servants would not give up control. It was hoped that all children would complete PS by 2007 and UPS by 2010.

One word here about the Anganwadi (AW) which is run under the Integrated Child Development Scheme. According to GOI web site on education there are 5614 projects. At least in Maharashtra the rule is that a project has a minimum of 100 Anganwadis under one supervisor and may have more than 250. It is likely that tribal or hilly areas may have fewer than 100. An Anganwadi may serve just one village or more depending on population as well as the distance to other villages. It is difficult to tell from this information how many children can access preschool education. One function of AW is to provide pre school education (PSE) to children between 3 to 6 years of age. (In Maharashtra this work is done by a separate institution called the Balwadi, which has a specially trained staff, but there will be either a Balwadi or an Anganwadi in any village.). The government found that of the 6-14 year old children currently in school 85% in ICDS areas and only 15% in non ICDS areas had received pre school education (PSE).

89 % of children with pre school education were sent by parents to primary school. But only 52 to 60% children without PSE did so. The never enrolled category had fewer children from PSEs. The overall finding was that PSE plays a large role in promoting enrollment, reduction in dropout rate and greater retention in school. Pre school education is routine with middle class children. There is no reason to deny it every one else. But after the 86th amendment no child can claim a right to PSE or an Anganwadi. Incidentally the document notes that the children could count up to 50 and could count 5 objects. This means they learnt the numbers without understanding them! We have shining example of how children may be motivated to go to school without any force . we have seen that parents have no problem in sending children to Anganwadis, and later they are quite willing to send them to primary school. Here is the answer to rampant misuse of compulsion. The preschool experience will make it unnecessary to use compulsion for all but a few hard cases. But now the 0 to 6 year olds have not been included in the safety net of fundamental rights.

It is now well accepted that among certain sections of NGOs and others who are involved in education that keeping children out of school is not necessarily a function of poverty. It is often the result of negative attitudes or of different priorities. This is especially true of girls. Even well off households may consider household skills more important for them.

It is not just the government that is confused on the issue of full time education. Even NGOs and intellectuals are confused. The bill to revamp The Child Labour (Regulation and Prohibition) Act was produced by an NGO. Many people weep buckets over the plight of the poor widow whose

son is her sole bread winner. Economists will tell us and MVF has proved that when children are withdrawn from the labour force, adults get the jobs *at higher wages*. Child labour leads to adult unemployment and lower wages. Children do not work because they are poor. They are poor because they work.

The point about quality education and relevant education has been misused to discourage education. The children who carry more books than their body weight also do not receive quality education. Another point is that the education is not relevant. For a five year old no education is 'relevant'. Till a child completes the age of fourteen there is no point in asking for relevant education. Going to school itself is education. It is even more so for children who have been kept out of school for centuries. Asking that education should be quality or have relevance before going to school is like learning to swim before getting into the pool. That will come when children and parents begin to experience education.

All this debate distracts us from the more serious problems. We are not even aware that NFE really provides poor quality irrelevant education. We pay no attention to the fact that fourteen is no age to stop education especially as the school leaver cannot enter the job market till s/he is eighteen years old. We do not ask about the dearth of Upper Primary schools and too few teachers. Fifty four years after the constitution came into force eleven years after *Umi Krishnan*, and two years after the 86th amendment we are not much further down the road, except that the popular desire for education has soared.

There is bitter opposition from the liberals to making education compulsory. They are afraid that the police will abuse their powers to persecute, beat, and even imprison poor parents. It is worth asking what compulsion has meant in other countries and in our own state of Baroda. We must remember that a right confers no obligation to act. I may have right to take legal action against my landlord, spouse and employer. But I am not compelled to do so. But if I have duty I have to perform it.

Things have become so ridiculously one sided that the Delhi government is planning mobile schools to go around slums because those children do not come to school³. The news item shows a mobile van with a blackboard and a teacher standing before a few students seated on a *durry*. What is to make them stay on till the end of the class? They only have a right to have a school; they have no duty to go to one! Secondly why should any one take the NFE camp seriously when the government itself takes education so lightly? Is that how children are meant to be taught?

³ Indian Express New Delhi, city edition (Express Newsline) 10th September 2004,p.1

Myron Wiener a well known student of child labour in India he world noted that many countries that had made education compulsory like Japan in 1872, the two Koreas, Taiwan And Peoples Republic of China all after World War II were poor. He then remarked.

The notion Education should not be regarded as a right granted by the state, but as duty imposed by the state. When education is made a duty parents, irrespective of their economic circumstances and beliefs are required by law to send their children to school. It is the legal obligation of the state to provide an adequate number of schools, appropriately situated and to ensure that no child fails to attend school⁶.

In another article Wiener noted,

Modern states regard education as a legal duty not merely as a right; parents are required to send their children to school, children are required to attend school and the state is obliged to enforce compulsory education...the state thus stands as the ultimate guardian of children, protecting them against both parents and would be employers⁷.

We repel against such statements because we would rather see the parents as paramount authority. Yet law has changed in many ways to put the interests of the child over and above those of the parents. This is notably so in cases of custody of the child. We even want the state to interfere when the parents give dowry. Yet when the child is not sent to school we still do not want to compel the parents.

Despite the widespread hunger for education there are people who do not believe in education at especially for girls. The parent must be duty bound to send the child to school, regardless of any pressing need to make cowdung cakes, graze the cow or attend to a guest. Finally the child must have duty to go to school, however much s/he may prefer to play cricket or *gilli danda*, or skip rope. Only then there will be an outcry against NFE schools, which get away right now by giving little or no education. Only when all this is put into place will we get full time schools which spend on educating the child in the real sense of the word.

⁶ Myron Wiener op.cit p87

⁷ Myron Wiener *The Right To Be A Child* UNICEF India Background Paper 1991

Marginalization of the Equity Agenda

by
Dr. Sadhna Saxena

Marginalization of the Equity Agenda → by Sadhna Saxena

Elementary education in India has received considerable attention in the last decade and a half with renewed vigour and zeal. If the late eighties and the early nineties was the era of adult literacy campaigns the focus shifted entirely to primary education roughly from 1992 with the international agencies evincing keen interest in funding primary education in the third world. Thrust on UEE, along with the beginning of era of economic liberalization in India, is not merely an historical coincidence. The renewed focus on Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) could be traced to much talked about Jomtien Conference in 1990 where the first Education For All (EFA) meet was held. Jomtien conference was held in the context impoverishing impact of the neo-liberal policies in Latin American and African countries, a fact that needed thorough debate and investigation during Jomtien as the countries that underwent reforms in the seventies were clearly showing further marginalisation of the deprived (Graham-Brown,1991; Kumar et al.,2000) : The conference, however, conveniently avoided any mention of this stark reality that apart from having dismal impact on the lives of the poor, was also enhancing the school dropout rates in some of these countries (Graham-Brown:1991). Instead, the Conference focussed on funding of education – offering soft loans to countries undergoing ‘stabilization’ and ‘reforms’.

Dismal state of primary education was highlighted further during the EFA conference held in New Delhi in 1993 for working out strategies for universalization of primary education in the nine most populous countries of the world. Evident implication that education has a role in reducing fertility rates cannot be overlooked. Thus the persistent anxiety and the propaganda of the developed world about the population growth in the developing countries became the agenda of the educationists, yet again. It successfully managed to hide the consequences of neo liberal economic policies from the public discourse. Focus on population and education also diffuses any possibility of open debate on issues such as, why should everyone go through the ‘schooling’ experience

where, given the state of schools what it is, at best no learning takes place or at worst the learners learn to blame themselves for everything.

Since Jomtien, the Indian state has come a long way and has extended its commitment from primary education to universalization of education up to class eight, at least in policy documents. This was the commitment during the Jomtien Conference but got diluted to primary education during the DPEP phase in India.

Problematizing education of the deprived, that remains a concern for the state and the civil society albeit for different reasons, is the primary focus of this paper. With this focus the paper looks at the changes that the elementary education has undergone in the past decade and a half and its long term implications. For the past many years the educationists have argued that the formal system of education is neither reaching the deprived sections nor is it relevant for them. There have been efforts by some to bring the philosophy of 'basic education' into the mainstream discourse on education for it seemed the only major departure from the colonial system education and possibly a relevant one for primarily agrarian society like India (Kumar, 2002; Saxena, 2000 and Shukla, 1979).

Basic education , the way it was envisaged by Gandhi, was never integrated in the post independent education policies, the critiques say. The fact that the primary education is still not accessible to more than 40 per cent school going age children does reopens this debate on the basic tenets of *Buniyadi Talim* . However, for the planners and the policy makers the appeal of basic education was primarily for its possible economic sustainability in the face of national commitment for provisioning free and compulsory education to all by 1960 (Saxena, 2000:40-41). This context is important as in the present times also the state is constantly 'struggling' to 'innovate' economically viable alternatives for educating its masses. Notwithstanding the hope of some of the uncurable optimist's dream of 'common schools', privatisation and the third tier of elementary education system, the Education Guarantee Scheme, for the 'un reached' are firmly in place. The changes that have been implemented in the past more than a decade or so draw justification precisely from the fact that there is no significant improvement in the drop

fact that there is no significant improvement in the drop out rate and claim that all the transformation in the system are for reaching the 'un reached'. The paper looks at some of these crucial changes and questions the justification.

The paper is divided in to two main sections. In the first section, the author summarises the issues related to targets, achievements and the poverty –education relationship. This is an indicative section, not based on exhaustive data as the purpose is to highlight the major trends to contextualise the arguments of the second section. The author is acutely aware of the fact that different data sources do show variation. However, by and large, they are statistically insignificant as they do not change the overall picture in any major way. The second section covers the major changes having the policy implications for universalization. This section also deals with the wider social and political implications of such changes and locate them in the context of conditionality of liberalization and show the contradiction between the stated goals of educating of the masses and dismantling of the existing system, good or bad, in the name of universalization. The paper argues that, in a sense, this new phase indicate another major departure in formal education. If it would actually help the deprived sections in accessing meaningful education for their children and help them lead a better life or marginalize them further, is a matter of debate.

SECTION I

Promise of DPEP and SSA

All centrally sponsored programmes for improving elementary education, including the state specific -education projects in Bihar, Rajasthan, UP, and Andhra Pradesh, and the ambitious District Primary Education Programme in 248 districts of 18 states are being integrated under one umbrella called Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The programme promises to provide free and compulsory satisfactory quality education to all children in the age group of 6-14 years, and carries a clear 'time frame' for universalising elementary education. In SSA, for universalising EE, emphasis is on community ownership. Its aims as stated in the 'Framework for Implementation' are:

'to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in the 6 to 14 age group by 2010'. And 'to bridge all social, regional and gender gaps, with the active participation of the community in the management of the schools' (SSA,2000:1).

Significant caveat however is that relevant education for all children may not be through regular schools but through alternative arrangements viz. Education Guarantee Centres, Alternate Schools and Back-to-school camps. Clearly, the commitment is not to provide 'schools' as the institution have been perceived but through teach anyhow strategies that are less expensive and more dependent on community resources. It is through such arrangements the SSA programme is aiming to 'bridge all gender gap and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007 and at elementary stage by the year 2010'; universal retention by 2010 by focusing on 'satisfactory education'. It is a tall order, more so since Indian history is replete with failures in achieving educational targets. Yet, instead of arriving at any deeper understanding of the fractured Indian reality, more targets are set. DPEP in that sense was less ambitious venture as in a limited time period of 5-years it aimed ' to reduce the differences in enrolment , drop out rate , and learning achievement among boys and girls and between social groups to less than 5 percent, and overall drop out rates to 10 percent reducing gender gaps'(Kumar et al.,2001:562),, not aimed at universalization, though its claim was the same.

A Brief Appraisal

Achievement levels

Despite this renewed thrust and efforts the education indicators do not show any dramatic improvement in the ground situation in achieving these goals. For example, the UNESCO, which is monitoring the global progress of EFA targets, in its recent report clearly underlines the fact that fourteen countries, most of which are sub Saharan Africa, but also include India, show Gender Parity Index (GPI, ratio of female- male enrolment) between 0.8 and 0.9. In India's case it is 0.84. Thus there is no hope for any of these countries achieving gender parity in enrolment by 2005(UNESCO: 2003). In any case,

GPI only has limited significance as it does not take into account the massive dropout especially, among girls. Also, it is a widely acknowledged fact that enrolment figures are generally inflated..

Nor do the achievement levels that are linked with the quality of education give any cause to rejoice. Jha and Jhingran (2003) report that 'children in class III or IV could not read or write properly or carry out simple multiplication/division exercises' (2002:50). Aggarwal's earlier report (2000) on achievement studies of DPEP showed equally dismal picture and the latest Pratham Survey also shows that on an average 25 per cent of all school children cannot write a dictated sentence even at age 14. Also, 95 per cent children between the age 7 and 10 could not do basic mathematics in Uttar Pradesh (Indian Express: 13.9.04). A comparative evaluation of EGS centres, alternative schools (ASs) and Prathmik Shiksha Karyakram (PRASHIKA) , Eklavya done by IIM, Ahmedabad also showed that the achievement levels in the EGS schools in Mathematics and Language drop drastically after class three (). 'Even, the states that have attained universal access, enrolment and retention, the quality of education is very poor' according to Mehta (2004:12).

Not that any of these are profound findings in themselves. Given the declining quality of educational inputs, even as new promises and programmes are announced, nothing better could have been expected. In fact , the economist should also examine the low expenditure rates (absorption of funds) in the SSA districts and its impact on the quality. There are reports that the absorption of funds at the district level is inadequate. It cannot be explained solely on the basis of red tape ism that does indeed leads to less educational work and rampant corruption. Bad expenditure pattern is also an indication of bankruptcy of creative ideas at the level of bureaucracy that controls the funds.

Poverty and education

The Tapas Majumdar committee Report (1999) estimates the size of out-of-school children to be about 60-70 million . In their comprehensive report on the 'Elementary

Education for the Poorest' based on extensive field work in ten backward districts from ten states Jha and Jhingran emphasis that, 'it is not only the size of out-of -school children that poses a challenge'. In fact recent trends in enrolment make it clear that it is more difficult to get children who remain outside of the school system now, even at the beginning of the new century, to school, as compared to those who were into the fold of schools in the past one or two decades .The report refers to Aggarwal's (2001) study that indicate stagnation or decline in overall enrolments in many districts seen during the second half of the 1990s. This is not only in the districts the writers say, 'where the age specific population ratio is on the decline; it includes many districts from states yet far from that plateau' (2002:2). They clarify that stagnation in enrolment does occur almost universally, but only after attaining a high rate of enrolment. 'However', they underline, 'what is really disturbing is the fact that many states or districts in educationally backward districts appear to have reached, or are going through, a period of stagnation in school participation rates at a much lower stage'(2002:3).

Mehta also points out in one of his recent write ups that despite improvements in retention rates, the dropout rates are still high at 40% and 57% respectively at primary and elementary levels. There is also unevenness across districts and states. It states that retention rates computed during 1998-99 showed that at the primary level, 'Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh etc. had a dropout rate higher than 50 per cent' (Mehta:10). The report points out that the trends in growth of primary schools reveal that the rates of growth were higher during decades following independence and they continuously declined thereafter. 'Growth rates in the number of primary schools and upper primary levels is low in Bihar and negative in Uttar Pradesh, the two populous states' (Mehta:200...).

Jha and Jhingran report also underlines the fact that , "The available evidence, based on analyses of large sample survey-based statistics, clearly reveals that the majority of in-school children come from economically better – off and majority of out-of-school children from the poorer sections of the society'(2003:3). The report asserts that the positive and strong correlation between poverty and school participation rates for

children makes it clear that the issue of non-participation needs to be understood in the specific context of low income or expenditure households. More so due to high incidence of poverty in India with nearly 300 to 350 million people living below the official poverty line (2003:5). The report reveals a glaring disparity that more than 50 million children who are out of the school belong to lower castes, class and scheduled tribes. On the basis of their study in Jharkhand, Rana and Das conclude that, 'abject poverty forces parents to employ children in activities other than studying' and 'forces many children to go out and gather their own food' (2004:1176). Their study shows intricate relationship of poverty, ill health and indebtedness also has implications for enrolment and attendance. They argue that in such situations, setting up more schools and increasing the number cannot succeed in making primary education available for all. Vaid (2004) in her recent study also found that the class emerged as a strong determinant of the relative chance of a child continuing in school.

The income or expenditure poverty, the Jha and Jhingran point out, 'is only one aspect of deprivation'. Apart from food insecurity, illness, lack of choices and opportunities, forced livelihood options, vulnerability to crisis etc. social deprivation due to the ascribed caste, tribe or religion, is another crucial form of deprivation, especially in highly stratified rural areas which impacts education severely.

None of these findings are also new discoveries. They need to be reiterated however as such issues are increasingly marginalized in the discourse of universalization. Such studies bring out the starkness of poverty- education correlation more systematically and emphasize the need to re-examine the structural constraints in achieving universal education. They may also give a fresh lease of life to the discourse of education for the deprived and lend it the complexity it deserves. The discourse that has got reduced either to the mechanistic target oriented access - retention levels or to the demand- supply model. The mainstream space for such a discourse has virtually been taken over by the high profile propaganda on universalization. The concerned people have either got trapped in the discourse on the issue of fundamental rights or the impending bill or

completely swamped by the international criticism of child labour, going to the extent of denying any correlation between child labour and poverty (Sinha.2004).

In recent times even a slogan , ‘a child outside the school is a child labour’ and a construct that dropouts are only due to bad schools, acquired a unique acceptability (for a comprehensive discussion on child labour and education see Krishna(1996); Kumar(1998) and Saxena(2002). This obfuscation of the structural constraints regarding the causes of deprivation has not helped the cause of universalization in any manner much as the shying away from the question why the deprived should accept the kind of universalization that the state propagates/offers did. The resurgence of the urgency of universalization coincides with the state surging ahead with its neo liberal policies and by and large, in the debates on education, this link is overlooked.

Despite the insurmountable constraints and slow overall progress, if not stagnation, of the agenda of elementary education, the call for universalization has enormous appeal. Also, earlier belief that the adult ignorance and indifference, if not irresponsibility, that deprived children of formal education and the present one that bad schools keep children from schools also enjoys widespread acceptance. What explains the enormous appeal of this argument in the media and among the middle class including professionals? Is it the propaganda surrounding the issue of education that illiteracy and lack of education lies at the heart of the range of social and economic problems that we face ? Or the deep anxiety that the uneducated masses are responsible for the backwardness? Does it also stem from the atavistic anxiety of the ruling elite that deprived may actually subvert the agenda of the elite if not “schooled”? Or is it because of its evident simplicity in explaining a deeply fractured world?

In the absence of a comprehensive understanding of the above and much more including the phenomenon of indifference to schooling amongst the economically and socially deprived sections, age old wastage and stagnation debate may rear its head again. This not only crucifies the ‘ignorant masses’ for not sending their children to schools and thus contributing in the wastage of national resources but also legitimises the privatisation of

school education completely marginalizing the issues of poverty, inequity and injustice. Comprehending the interplay of economic and social deprivation in pushing children out of the school system is important. Equally important is having an as objective assessment of the relevance of the given type of formal education in the lives of these sections of the society.

Undermining the significance of education, not 'schooling' though, is not the intention here. Effort here is to highlight the fact that wider social and economic realities of the children play important role in determining their education. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper engagement with this issue in the light of grim education indicators. Stagnation in enrolment and high dropout rates, at one level, indicate the structural constraints linked to social and economic deprivation. Low achievements, on another level, is also indicative of the kind of educational opportunities people have access to. So, the interplay of a variety of deprivations either does not allow them educational access, push them out of the system or offers bad education or no education at all. Despite odds, whoever manages to stay learns little, if at all. People who need more affirmative action in education not only in terms of material resources but also in terms of academic reinforcement, who are first generation learners and have no opportunity even to read a book beyond school hours are actually been deprived of even the 'bad schools' that existed prior to 1990s.

SECTION II

Three-tier system of education for universalization

The promise of universalization of elementary education has always accompanied with the creation of parallel and cheaper alternative for the marginalized people. Even inclusion of basic education in the Kothari Commission had more to do with its promise of self sustenance and less with the its conceptual thrust. The idea of non-formal education was also rooted in this search for less expensive education alternatives for the deprived groups. However, the changes of the nineties are different. During this phase not only new variety of parallel systems are being created but the old institutions are also

undergoing transformations that may leave them beyond recognition 10 to 20 years down the line.

In the following section, I will discuss some of these crucial changes that have been introduced in the formal education system in past one decade or so. For seeking legitimacy, the ideas are given emotive articulation as well such as, 'the unreached have been reached for the first time after independence' or 'generations of children have been wasted away waiting for primary education' (Gopalakrishnan and Sharmia 1998). Should people accept (and not resist) the kind of schooling that the state is providing in the name of universalization and the educationist reduce themselves to mere promoters of the of this agenda? Or their role is in providing critical framework for analysing such changes in a wider perspective ?

I would argue that the state, on one level, through its publicity machinery and promotional materials , is building up environment regarding its commitment towards UEE but in reality it is dismantling the system that existed. Though the pace of change is uneven, it is happening across the states. Contractualisation and privatisation of education is a consequence of conditions of liberalisation, of the reform process and there is no getting away from it as far as the state is concerned . African and Latin American countries witnessed this in the seventies and eighties, it began in South Asia and China in the nineties and is still continuing. The disturbing aspect is that such changes create enormous insecurity and uncertainty that organised resistance, at least amongst teachers, is becoming a remote possibility. Such changes are first introduced at the micro levels and then rather surreptitiously incorporated into the national policies as happened in case of SSA. The smoke screen of quality and pedagogy, that prevents engagement with the political repercussions, is helping the smooth transition.

Para teachers , community participation and EGS

I would begin this section by narrating two incidences. Recently, in one of the tribal blocks of a district in Madhya Pradesh I encountered an interesting situation where an active Gram sabha was trying to tackle the issue of teacher absenteeism in their village school. The members of the gram sabha were very keen to sit on a dharna in front of the BDO's office to demand action against this teacher. The teacher, I was told, is generally very irregular and didn't come on that particular day despite that being the mid-term examination day. While the members were busy deciding the action plan, one of the Panchayat member intervened and informed the gathering that this para teacher had not been paid for the past four months. Incidentally, such delays in payment of emoluments in case of contract teachers, is almost a rule rather than an exception. Despite this, the teacher was attending school, cycling almost 30 kms, through the forest, to reach this village. This information stunned the villagers. This one piece of information changed the course of their conversation and they started talking about the positive things this single teacher had done for the school. They reminded each other that for a long time the school was without a teacher until his appointment. Since then, the village middle school is being run by this single para teacher, I was told.

Here was an active gram sabha willing to take teacher to task but ran out of ideas when focus of blame shifted to the education department. Could they see the role of the state in transforming their proper middle school into a barely functional, single para teacher dependent school, while retaining the status of this village 'with a middle school' on the national map, I wondered. Incidentally, this was not an isolated incident. My investigations showed that in that particular block itself many of the regular schools were being run primarily by para teachers with at the most one or two regular teachers. With a ban on the regular appointments still in force in Madhya Pradesh and government having found various 'less expensive' alternatives of regular teachers endorsed by the national government, there seems to be no going back on this strategy. This happened in African and Latin American countries in the seventies and early eighties. In India, though the process started in the nineties as a policy decision first at the state levels and later at the national levels, various models were tried out much before that (For a detailed discussion

on the history of this concept, justification, working condition of para teachers and politics of this see Kumar et al :2001).

The second incidence is not a direct experience. It was a news item reported in TV and news papers. The news was about a massive protest by thousands of para teachers in Rajasthan who were appointed during the previous Congress regime and promised regular appointments by the BJP. They worked for BJP during elections and were let down by them as after coming to power their services were not regularised and hence the protest . Almost similar incidences were reported from Chhatisgarh. A school teacher's job has thus been reduced to political patronage of either a political party or the village education committee or the gramsabha.

Contractualization of teaching services is common knowledge and is acquiring middle class sanction also as the general perception about teachers, especially the village teachers, is that they don't work. With the teachers unions being rendered almost defunct, apart from sporadic protests like the ones that happened in Rajasthan and Chhatisgarh, not much is happening in restoring the professional dignity of the teachers. Legal battles that have been fought in some of the states have really been within the larger frame of the contractual jobs and winning the battles have meant only marginal improvement in the service conditions (Kumar et al :2001). The latest data on the appointment of teachers shows that except Haryana, Gujrat and southern states (except Andhra Pradesh) all other states are recruiting para teachers against the regular vacant posts. And except for Punjab, Gujrat, Sikkim and few North Eastern states all other states are lagging behind in filling their vacant posts. In the eastern and the North Eastern regions only contractual appointments are being made (Ed.Cil.: 2004). A recent report on UP informs that the state is in the process of appointing 31000 more para teachers (Shiksha Mitras) to bring down the pupil teacher ratio and this will take the total number of para teachers in UP to 70000 (Shukla:2004).

Job insecurity combined with limited training, bad service conditions, low emoluments, limited or no access to academic support and the decentralised recruitment policy has actually eroded the status and authority of the teachers and has been a major source of discontent and lack of motivation. Evidently the quality of classroom transactions have become poorer. Madhya Pradesh is one state where regular appointments have been banned and the burden of universalization and quality education is more or less on the shoulders of a variety of para teachers. The survival of such teachers in the system is often dependent not on their sincerity and the quality of work but on the patronage of the VEC or the village panchayat.

Emergence of the concept of para teachers could be traced to much acclaimed shiksha karmi (SK) scheme in Rajasthan that was to take care of the teacher absenteeism in the village schools. Interestingly, this scheme came into being as the regular teachers were not willing to go and stay in the villages implying thereby that for badly connected habitations and backward villages there was need for special planning for making the job attractive and challenging. Instead , the government opted for less expensive alternatives. From governments own account the shiksha karmis were supposed to work as social workers. He or she will be a voluntary worker and will not consider himself or herself a government employee. They are often compared with the bare foot doctors of China and are called change agents. It is an admission of the fact that working conditions were such that regular trained government teachers were not willing to go and stay in such areas. They were obviously not expected to do social work. So, instead of improving the working conditions state found a way out by taking refuge in the argument that appointing local people would help the situation. Though such a decision had no empirical basis but was appealing enough to allow the state on compromising on qualification, remuneration, infrastructure and working conditions in teaching profession. The exploitation of shiksha karmis has thus been justified by calling them change agents and social workers.

This arrangement is not as innocent as it is made out to be. If one looks at the experiences of societies that started implementing the neo liberal agenda a decade before

India it is evident that contractualization of teaching services flows from overall structural adjustment policies. Cutting public expenditure on welfare programmes including health and education; privatisation of such services and restraint on wages and public sector employment are the steps for "stabilisation" of economy. In any case the change agent argument falls flat on its face as now in most of the states para teachers are appointed in lieu of regular teachers and these may or may not be interim arrangements. The following story cited by Susan George may help in seeing the changes in global perspective. It is a story of a primary school teacher in Bolivia, on strike for a living wage:

'Under pressure from the IMF, the government has frozen salaries. Depending on the category, a teacher earns between (US\$10 and \$40 monthly at the May 1986 rate)... The minimum food basket as calculated by the (Central Trade Union Organisation) costs (US\$1600. We knew that we would never get that from the government so we asked for (US\$60). Well, the government won't even negotiate. They just said that any teacher who wasn't in the classroom Monday was fired and his job would be considered vacant I don't think enough will go back to stop the movement. Teachers all have to do another job anyway to survive. Some drive taxis or deal on black market.

The real long term problem is the quality of teaching. Nobody is motivated to teach with salaries like that, or to prepare the lessons. A lot of children are dropping out in the early grades now in order to work trampling the coca leaves (the first stage of cocaine processing) The ones that do come to school are malnourished their parents don't have enough money to feed them and they arrive with empty stomachs so they cannot concentrate or they fall asleep in class' (Graham-Brown,1991:39).

China has been liberalising its economy at a feverish pace and the general impression to the outside world is that considering the growth rates China is probably doing very well. However, the social consequences of economic reforms which affect the lower strata most, remain invisible. Regarding school education The Monthly Review reports.

'Chinese schools have become increasingly privatised, they charge the parents steeper fees' and " rising school fees and low incomes " are keeping an increasing number of children out of the classrooms" especially in rural areas. With the central government

having “ largely stopped subsidizing primary education a decade ago...education is increasingly a luxury item in China’s poorest villages, purchased only when finances allow -- and far more often for boys than for girls. In some villages only 20 percent girls and 40 percent boys attend school. There are entire provinces where less than half of the girls attend any schools at all —and many who drop out before completing the elementary level’ (2004:61).

In the Indian situation, we may draw solace from the fact that we have worked out alternative strategies for reaching the unreached through Education Guarantee Schemes (Centres), Alternative schools and Back- to- school camps as listed in SSA’s action plan. These alternatives make the system of education a three tier system – private schools, government schools and the alternative arrangement for the people who cannot access regular government schools. The emergence of such alternative arrangements at the state level, their subsequent legitimization and appearance in the national document shows the failure of the state in providing quality education to its masses. The idea of such alternatives draws justification by claiming that Education Guarantee Scheme ‘supplied’ education to the unreached for the first time since independence and ensures community participation. Such poorer versions of existing ill equipped government schools does away with whatever commitment to equity in education existed on paper prior to this.

Participation of the community here implies withdrawal of state as it does not take the responsibility of providing infrastructure for such schemes. The government only provides meagre funds for one or two contract teachers and teaching learning materials. Onus of providing space for conducting classes falls on the community, an arrangement that deprives children their right to have a decent public place for their education. Surely, this distinction of public and private (somebody’s house or courtyard for conducting classes) space cannot be glorified in the name of community ownership as has been done in Madhya Pradesh from where the idea originated. Although in the face of criticism, the Madhya Pradesh government was compelled to construct a few buildings under this scheme however, these were exceptions rather than the rule. Taking a cue from the MP experience, EGS found respectable space in the national policy and now the ‘community

owned' scheme for the deprived sections is firmly in place. The only systematic study of EGS and other primary schools in MP in the context of studying the impact of education policy reforms on the school system stated the following in its conclusions,

'To conclude definitely, field work done in Shahpur and Tonk Khurd block suggests that changes taking place in the primary school supply of rural Madhya Pradesh consist in extension via division of the school system rather than its universalisation. The impact on society (and the economy) of these changes risks being limited, as it is the state's conception of education which is being adapted to current social structures rather than social structures being challenges by the introduction of the 'revolutionary' concept of universal education'. Further, ' The current trend is towards making the school supply the outcome of local *market* mechanisms under the control of the same influential social groups either through decentralization or through privatisation. A 'schooling revolution' will be achieved only if local *politics* are made to promote a democratic but radical *policy* of education for all' (Leclercq,2002:166-67).

It is a fairly common experience that decentralisation and community participation in the stratified rural society invariably implies continued domination of influential people who can provide resources, including space, for running a centre or a school. Public funding neutralises this domination to a certain extent, at least in principle, as it is a matter of right for all the citizens and school is a public place. Such is obviously not the case with individual benevolence. Deprived sections generally have no resources to contribute, except their labour. Hence, such arrangements, by and large strengthen the existing power hierarchy. Commenting on the impact of decentralization, in the context of setting up village Education committees (VECs) Sarangpani and Vasavi state, 'These have been effective only in some villages, where the landed and relatively well off and powerful families have been able to engage with teachers and the education bureaucracy.' And the situation , 'where the communities that have not been able to mobilise funds or resources such as land, or wield significant political influence, continue to be either without schools or have very inadequate structures' (2003:3404).

ANOTHER FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

Free and Compulsory education for all children in the 6-14 age group has become a fundamental right through the 93rd Constitutional Amendment Act 2002. In compliance with this the first draft legislation was prepared and posted on the website for inviting comments from the public. So, the draft bill, prepared by the previous government, was in circulation in the public domain and has been critiqued by several people (Balgopalan,2004; Sadgopal,2004; Tilak,2003) until it was finally withdrawn by the present regime. Presumably, bill will be drafted again. Generally, it is believed that the Fundamental Right will at least give space for negotiating the resources for the education of the deprived sections. Keeping this focus, the bill has been critiqued primarily on two counts: it legitimises the two (three?) tier system of education and its clauses regarding penalising the parents or the guardians of the children that effectively puts the onus of universalization on the poor parents. Other states, where such acts existed long before the central government woke up, there are instances of penalising the parents (Priyam etc.:2002). Would these two factors be taken care off in the new draft, is a crucial issue. Significance of this has to be seen in the context of the SSA policy, the framework and action plan for universalization, as the two(three?) tier system of education flows from there.

However, the issue of right to education has to be discerned in the context of right to livelihood as this has to be distinguished from the rights that are called the first generation rights, traditional liberties and privileges of citizenship: religious toleration, freedom from arbitrary arrest, free speech, the right to vote, and so on. The second generation rights are, according to Waldron, 'socio-economic claims: the right to education, housing health care, employment and adequate standard of living'. And further that, 'No one can fully enjoy or exercise any right that she is supposed to have if she lacks the essentials for a healthy and active life'. And that, 'death disease, malnutrition and exposure are as much matter of concern as any denials of political or civil liberty. Where such predicaments are unavoidable, a refusal to address them is an evident insult to human dignity and failure to take seriously the unconditional worth of each person' (Waldron:578). In the context of the rights discourse and the sense of

achievement that the constitutional amendment unleashed, one is tempted to ask a question: how is this right in isolation going to make any difference to at least those 300 to 350 million people who live below the official poverty line and thus whose right to life is tampered with?

CONCLUSION

The agenda of universalization of elementary education has diminished the universality goal of education on the following counts:

- The issue of equality has finally been abandoned, not in principle, but certainly in practice, at the level of policy formulation and action plan that flow from the policy statement.
- Inclusion of alternatives for schooling without the commitment of proper funding even for such alternatives, holding community responsible for providing the major infrastructure facilities, the state has ensured no education for the majority of the children from the disadvantaged background.
- Why should every child go through the experience of schooling as envisaged in the agenda of universalization of EE ? Such fundamental issues are not even considered unsettled or contentious. The role of majority of the educationists is thus been reduced to the to the level promoters of the state agenda instead of critical thinkers.

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Right to Education:

Implications of Constitutional Amendment, Policy Issues and Response of the State

by
Amarjeet Sinha

OPERATIONALIZING THE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEE OF RIGHT TO EDUCATION: ISSUES OF RESOURCE CRUNCH AND STATE COMMITMENT

THE CONTEXT

This paper is an effort to understand the context of the 86th Constitutional amendment 2002 to make elementary education a fundamental right for child in the 6-14 age group. It will try and examine the implications of the Constitutional amendment with respect to the obligations of the State, the State defined as per Article 12 of the Constitution of India as the Central, the State and the Local Governments. The assumption in this paper is that the Constitutional amendment has created a legal right and space for its assertion. The effective implementation of this right, in letter and spirit, depends on the way the State responds to the entitlement of every Indian child, the resources it allocates for quality universal elementary education, the reforms it undertakes for communities to be more assertive in the management of schools, the power relations it transforms to make schools more autonomous and locally accountable, and most importantly, the education it imparts to all children. Former Education Minister M.C. Chagla's Presidential address to the Central Advisory Board of Education in 1964 summed up the concerns appropriately - "*Our Constitution fathers did not intend when they enacted Article 45 that we just set up hovels or any sort of structures, put students there, give them untrained teachers, give them bad textbooks, no play grounds and say we have complied with Article 45. The compliance that was intended was a substantial compliance. They meant that real education should be given to our children between the ages of 6 and 14.*"

The issue of education of children had been a subject of debate and contention even during the days of the freedom movement. There were many critiques of the colonial Macaulayan School system on the grounds that it was not good as a mass system since its focus was on producing a few babus and clerks. Mahatma Gandhi's 'Buniyadi Shiksha', Dr. Zakir Husain's 'Nayaee Taleem', Sri Aurobinda's critique, Rabindra Nath Tagore's experiments with education, all attempted alternatives that were deeply embedded in the natural, social and philosophical context of the east.

They highlighted the need for integrating physical and mental development and allowing children opportunities at self-development through exploration, innovation and by doing. Many of these innovations were pedagogically very sound. They however got absorbed in the mainstream on account of weak linkages with post basic education and a need for a common school system that had the same curriculum across all schools. In many ways, the marginalisation of these experiments, led to the demise of efforts at 'non-formalizing the formal', eventually ending up in a textbook centric school system. Mahatma Gandhi, deeply influenced as he was by Leo Tolstoy, looked at the State's role in education with deep suspicion, recommending self-reliant schools that could generate their own resources. Tolstoy's comment when asked why Czar did not spend adequately on education, *that education is a matter of enlightenment and no monarch in his senses would like to do that*, had greatly influenced Gandhi's thinking. We have, of course, with a democratic state, assigned the obligation of basic education for all children, to the State itself.

More recent experiments like the Hoshangabad Science Teaching Project, the work of Eklavya, experiments of the Rishi Valley School in the cluster schools, Nalli Kali experiments in Karnataka, innovations in DPEP Kerala, Reading experiments of Pratham, did try to question textbook centric thrusts and argued for systems of learning that allow children to move at their own pace. Experiments and innovations in the governmental and the non-governmental sector in the 1980s and 1990s made a strong case that all children can learn if provided an opportunity to do so. The experiments advocated greater flexibility, community involvement, resources at school level, in order to ensure that all children learn. The thrust for non-formalising the formal, however, has been weak, in spite of these efforts. Heavy curriculum load, textbook centric approaches, examination based assessments, continue to exert pressure on children from a very young age. The heavy curriculum load, with inability of poor parents to buy tuition time and reference books, further confounds the inequity of our school system.

Article 45 of the Constitution of India declared that 'the State shall endeavour to provide free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of fourteen years, within ten years of the Constitution'. Though a Directive Principle of State Policy, it was expected that this would be a guiding principle of State led development. The arguments for free and compulsory education gained from the debates on compulsory education in other developed countries like UK and this had even led to Gopal

Krishna Gokhale tabling a Bill on compulsory education much before India became independent. Various Education Commissions continued to make a case for elementary education of satisfactory quality and the need to make at least 6 percent GDP public investment in education was made forcefully by the Kothari Commission in 1966. The National Policy of Education 1986, as revised in 1992, provided for universal elementary education of satisfactory quality by the turn of the Century. Other important Commissions and Committees like the Ramamurthi Commission, the Yashpal Committee, provided useful suggestions on improving the quality of elementary education and ensuring learning by all children. The 42nd Constitutional amendment, among other things, made education a concurrent subject, instead of a State subject, on the ground that the Centre ought to play an 'equalizing role' to ensure that children were not denied basic education even in resource-poor States.

The intervention of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in 1993 in the Unnikrishnan Case to declare education of children up to the age of 14 a fundamental right, irrespective of the economic capacity of the State, has to be seen in the light of the broad policy commitments and the seemingly unsatisfactory provision made for universal elementary education in spite of it. While GDP public investments had moved up from 0.5 % at the time of independence to nearly 3.5 percent in the 1990s, more primary and upper primary schools had been established, teachers' salaries in Government/local body schools had improved remarkably compared to pre-independence times, all children were neither in school nor were all children learning.

The 1990s had seen an unprecedented demand for education even from the poorest households and it was clearly a failure of the State to provide functioning, well - equipped schools to meet this strong community demand. The PROBL study had highlighted the dismal state of government/local body schools in many of the large Hindi speaking States. It had also made a case of how Himachal Pradesh had witnessed a schooling revolution, making the point that effective public action can make the difference. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments for decentralization and local democracy had created space for participation. Reservation for women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other backward classes, had created a movement for social participation, with all its limitations, reflecting even in a greater demand for schooling. The Total Literacy Campaigns in the 1990s had also highlighted the growing demand for elementary education from the poorest households. The efforts at Constitutional reforms have to be seen in this backdrop.

The Constitutional Amendment to make elementary education a fundamental right was an occasion when a lot of debates were generated on what was being attempted. The criticism was mainly on four counts – the 0-6 age group was being left out, the commitment of financial resources was far short of the 6% public investment promised by the Kothari Commission, the obligation on parents/guardians was not desirable and quality will suffer as many low cost alternatives were now being proposed for alternative education. While all the criticism appear very serious and well-founded there is a need to look at issues not merely from ideological positions but pragmatic ones as well. *It is important to realize that government systems rarely make quantum jumps as governments, by definition, make incremental gains. No one questions the ideal; one has also to recognize the real as well, especially at a time when fiscal constraints at the Central and the State level were putting pressure on resources. If quality elementary education is a priority that has strong political commitment, that commitment ought to reflect in more financial resources for the sector. As the Pupils Majumdar Committee established so forcefully, additional financial resources required for UEE of satisfactory quality was well within the commitment of 6 percent GDP. Rather than reaching a standstill, the assumption in moving ahead with a programme for UEE guaranteeing minimum learning conditions, was to put community pressure for more resources through an intensive household based habitation upwards process of planning. The hope was that communities that plan for universalisation shall also, at some point of time, demand resources for it. The legal framework was expected to exert further pressure by making the right justiciable.*

It is important to understand the process of policy formation in a developing democracy. Article 45 of the Directive Principles of State Policy regarding free and compulsory education up to the age of fourteen years, within ten years of the Constitution, was not exerting the kind of influence on policy planning as it ought to have. The best indication of this neglect of the only time bound Directive Principle is best illustrated by the disarmingly low school participation rates at the time of the 42nd National Sample Survey 1986-87. Clearly, the Indian State had failed in its obligation to provide free and compulsory education. The Supreme Court's ruling in the Bandhua Mukti Morcha Case and subsequently in the J.P. Unni Krishnan case, 1993, brought the debate on right to basic education centre stage. The Hon'ble Courts ruled that it is inconceivable to provide right to life, without the right to basic education. It

dismissed arguments about the economic capacity of the state as far as education up to the age of 14 years was concerned. The Unnikrishnan case was followed by the spirited efforts of Satyapal Anand to hold the Indian state accountable in its obligation to children. The States were directed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court to report on progress made in making elementary education a fundamental right.

As a response to the Hon'ble Supreme Court's pro-active espousal of the fundamental right to elementary education, it entered the manifestos of political parties and the United Front Government included it in its manifesto. This led to the setting up of the Muhi Ram Saikia Committee with Education Ministers of States as its members, deliberating on implications of making elementary education a fundamental right. In its report submitted in 1997, it endorsed the demand for a constitutional amendment to make elementary education for 6-14 age children a fundamental right. The 83rd Constitutional Amendment Bill, 1997, introduced by the United Front Government in the Rajya Sabha, reflected the views of the Muhi Ram Saikia Committee. As is the case, the draft Bill was scrutinised by a Parliamentary Standing Committee that invited suggestions from civil society. The 165th Report of the Law Commission of India also endorsed the proposed Constitutional amendment and placed a draft proposal for a central legislation to enforce the amendment.

It was during this period that the influential Public Report on Basic Education was published (1999) and released by Amartya Sen, making a strong case for the fundamental right to elementary education, given the strong demand for education from the poorest households. Organizations of NGOs like the National Alliance for the Right to Education (NARE) kept the issue centre stage through a series of national and regional consultations. The Tapas Majumdar Committee, 1999, further emphasised that the resource needed for a norm based provisioning for elementary education was well within the repeated commitment made by successive Prime Ministers of 6 % public investment in elementary education. The formidable figure of an additional Rupees 1,36,822 crores over a ten year period given by the Tapas Majumdar Committee, did make the Finance Ministry uneasy about the cost implications of making elementary education a fundamental right. The delays in its approval can be explained in the context of these competing claims on public resources.

The financial memorandum for the resubmitted constitutional amendment bill that has now been approved indicated a figure of Rupees 98,000 crores over a ten

year period for elementary education. The requirement of resources was lower than the assessment made by the Tapas Majumdar Committee, only because of teacher deployment at 1:40 instead of 1:30 and the implications it has for school facilities. It was also a pragmatic assessment given the fact that most states now recruit teachers at less than pay scale, at least for some years. Neither was there a major slashing of norms, nor a rejection of engagement of regular fully paid teachers. Nothing in SSA presents States from recruiting fully paid teachers. Comparison of SSA norms and Tapas Majumdar Committee norms will make the point clearer:

COMPARING TAPAS MAJUMDAR COMMITTEE AND SSA NORMS

PROVISION	MAJUMDAR COMMITTEE	SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN
Overall projection	Resources need of an additional Rupees 1,36,822 crores over ten years. Assumed full pay scale for all teachers from day one – this is not the practice in many States now. Provided 1:30 teacher Pupil Ratio as against the 1:40 National Policy commitment. Assumed all school room construction to come out of Education Department resources, made no concession for private unaided sector. Even then, the resource requirement is well within the national commitment of 6% GDP public investment.	Projected an additional resource need of about Rupees 60,000 crores in ten years. The lower projection was for the following reasons: 1:40 instead of 1:30 teacher pupil ratio, this has implications for number of classrooms as well when the commitment is a room for every teacher; entire cost of construction is not projected in SSA as it is expected to converge with other Department's schemes. SSA assumes that 10-15% children will access private unaided institutions; SSA assumes teacher salaries as often being less than full pay scale in many States, though it provides for full salary if that is the State's policy.
Teachers	1:30 The requirement worked out to more than 33 lakh new teachers	1:40 The requirement works out to nearly 11 lakh additional teachers, since nearly five lakh three already been added in the 1990s.
Schools	Primary school within a kilometre and one Upper primary School for every two Primary schools	Primary School/ EGS within a kilometre, depending on number of children, and an Upper Primary School for every two Primary Schools
Teachers	1:30 at Primary and Upper primary level with at least two teachers in a Primary school	1:40 at Primary and Upper Primary School with at least two teachers in every Primary School and three teachers in Upper primary Schools.
Classrooms	A room for every teacher and a room for the Head Master in the Upper Primary Schools All construction costs covered in financial assessment	A room for every teacher and a room for the Head master in Upper Primary Schools 33% on construction. Assumes convergence with Rural and Urban Development Ministries to access more resources for construction.
School Equipment	Rs.2000 to every existing Upper Primary School, and Rs. 1000 to every new Primary School	Rs. 50,000 to unaided Upper Primary Schools and Rs. 10,000 to every new Primary School
Textbooks and Stationary	For all children at Primary and Upper	Free textbooks for all girls, SC, ST

	Primary level	children at Primary and Upper Primary level
Scholarships and uniforms	For all children below poverty line	No provision for scholarships and uniforms as it is expected to come from other programmes of State Government/ Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment
Free Cooked Meals	For poor children	Mid day meal scheme is outside SSA but works closely together.
Establishment of DIETs	In uncovered Districts, Blocks and Centres	BRCs and CRCs from SSA, DIETs under the revised Teacher Education Scheme of GoI that is outside SSA but works very closely to meet SSA needs.
Provision for school maintenance and replacement of school equipment	Provided	Provided
Teacher training	Provided	Provided
Coverage of all disabled children	Provided	Provided
Private unaided schools	50% concessions made in the calculations for private unaided assuming that they all have hidden subsidies	Assumption that 10-15% children will actually opt for private unaided schools.

EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION IN INDIA

Year	Total Revenue Expenditure on Education (in Rupees Crores)	Percentage of Education Expenditure compared to expenditure on all sectors	Percent of education expenditure as percentage of GDP
1951-52	64.46	7.92	0.64
1960-61	239.56	11.99	1.48
1970-71	892.36	10.16	2.11
1980-81	3884.20	10.67	2.98
1990-91	19615.85	13.37	3.84
1994-95	32606.22	12.95	3.56
1999-2000	77056.3(RE)	14.61	4.31

Source: Select Education Statistics 2000-2001, MHRD.

PER CAPITA EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION IN 1997/98
(RUPEES AT 1981/82 PRICES)

State	Per Capita Expenditure in 1997/98 (Rupees)
Himachal Pradesh	191
Kerala	164
Maharashtra	158
Tamil Nadu	144
Gujarat	147
Assam	134
Jharkhand	134
Karnataka	130
Rajasthan	128
Orissa	102
West Bengal	101
Andhra Pradesh	88
Uttar Pradesh	78
Bihar	76
Madhya Pradesh	73

Source: Dr. Sugata Basu: Government Expenditure on Elementary Education in the Nineties: 2000.

From the Tables above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, there has been an increase in the allocation of resources for education if we consider the long-term trend since independence. The increases in the 1990s, however, have not been so significant as yet. While part of it can be explained by the fact that the GDP growth itself has been very high therefore additional allocations do not reflect as a larger percentage. It must also be borne in mind that the slowing down of expenditures has also been on account of the fact that the State Governments have been reluctant to make expenditures where recurrent liabilities are generated. Since schooling is a permanent arrangement and teachers a necessary requirement for effective learning, the requirement is of more recurring expenditures. SSA took into account this reluctance of states to incur expenditure in designing a sustainable financing arrangement for teacher salaries beyond the five year plan periods. Otherwise, we had the paradox of State Governments not having the resources to invest in elementary education and Government of India not knowing how to utilise its resources.

Secondly, the per capita expenditures in States with large out of school children continues to be lower than others. There is a strong case for stepping up investments in such States if millennium development goals have to be attained.

Thirdly, while the SSA is a minimalist norm-based approach, it does provide for the basic minimum learning conditions for effective teaching and learning. The higher utilization by the States will really be the test of its effectiveness in pushing up

investments in the elementary education sector. Higher utilization of resources over the last two years of the SSA programme is a testimony of its ability to fill the missing gaps.

Fourthly, District Elementary Education Plans are expected to put pressure for more resources based on actual needs to meet uncovered gaps. Since democracies work through pressure groups, it is hoped that the demand for quality basic education will put pressure for more resources. The Programme Approvals Board under SSA approves a perspective plan that has a ten year perspective. The financial approvals are for the Tenth Plan period. If we total up these approvals, it is far higher than the resources being currently earmarked for elementary education. This is bound to create pressure on democratic governments. The commitments of the Common Minimum Programme of the newly elected government to 6 percent GDP expenditure, hot cooked meals, wage guarantees for the poor, cess on taxes for education and health, are positive steps. The perspective plans of districts under SSA for UEL will provide an opportunity for use of the additional resource commitments.

Fifthly, increase in GDP spending was also on account of higher salaries in many states in the wake of the Fifth Pay Commission. With retiring fully paid teachers being replaced by para teachers, salary expenditures have stabilised over the last few years. There is, therefore, a need to go into the effectiveness of the expenditure rather than make conclusions only on the basis of broad expenditure trends. One also has to keep in mind the higher rates of growth in the 1990s and its implications for GDP based percentage expenditures.

Clearly the Constitutional amendment and the national programme for UEF, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, is a major step forward as it is for the first time that planning for every child is the basis for the programme. The commitment to UEF is not only in policy -- it is in a programme and surely this will put pressure on the state both for reform and for resources. The District Elementary Education Plans that are to be the basis of planning for SSA are likely to exert pressure for additional resources for elementary education. It is hoped that ultimately in a democracy, people's will shall triumph.

Reverting to the main points of criticism regarding the Constitutional amendment, no one disputes the importance of early childhood care and education. Given the high levels of malnourishment in the 0-3 age children, food security as well is a very important concern. The question, however is, that at present, even if the

ICDS system was assumed to be working at full capacity (which it does not), the coverage of the 0-6 age children will only be 20-25 percent of the age group. While ideologically it should be made a fundamental right, at the present stage of coverage, making it a fundamental right will amount to nothing but enacting a farce as we are not in a position to enforce compliance to it unless there is a quantum leap in allocations for the 0-6 age group. That is why the second best option of explicitly stating early childhood care and education as a Directive Principle of State Policy has been attempted under the amendment. The Supreme Court's recent ruling on an ICDS centre in every habitation, if operationalized, can make a case for early childhood care and education, as a fundamental right. With hot cooked meals in schools, there could be more under age children in formal schools and this may put pressure for establishing a pre-Class one preparatory class to take care of pre-school education.

On the issue of resources, as mentioned earlier, while there is a departure from the Tapas Majumdar assessments especially with regard to teacher pupil ratio and actual teacher emoluments, there are no major departures on norms. It is rightly argued that pedagogically, a move to 1:30 ratio, as suggested by the Yashpal Committee may be a superior and necessary option, especially for the first generation learners. At a time when States like UP, Bihar and West Bengal had teacher pupil ratios in more than 20 percent schools in the range of 80 to 100, it was important to first establish the school specific (and not district or state specific) norm of 1:40. On the issue of duty of parents, the amendment clearly places the obligation on the state (the local, the state and the central) and not on the parents. The idea of making it the duty of parents is to make schooling merge as a social norm, irrespective of gender or disability. On the issue of low cost initiatives, SSA is primarily about strengthening formal systems through reforms and resources. Its objective is quality education for which a lot of the emphasis is on assuring minimum learning conditions for each child. That is why the norms are worked out for every child, every habitation and every school. The norm based approach has been adopted to improve transparency and make people know their rights to basic education. With the Central legislation on free and compulsory education, communities should be in a position to demand basic learning conditions for their children, deduced on the basis of transparent child-school-habitation specific norms of SSA. While doing so, care has to be taken to ensure that alternative forms of learning are only seen as an interim measure and not a cost-cutting effort.

The challenge of the constitutional amendment and the SSA programme is to put community pressure for more accountable and well-endowed government and local body schools. It is poor households that are sending their children to these schools and any improvement in the condition of these schools will affect the lives of the poor directly. The Constitutional amendment facilitates a rights based approach to meeting the obligation of the state. While it is true that allocation of resources for basic education is always a struggle, it is hoped that planning for all children with community ownership under the programme of SSA will put greater pressure on the political executive to fulfil the obligation of quality of basic education. A need based demand for resources based on meticulous household based planning is the best way of putting pressure on the democratic state to put more resources in a more accountable basic education system.

II

WHERE ARE WE ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES? ARE ALL CHILDREN IN SCHOOL?

This Section examines the progress on basic education since 1986 by looking at a large number of independent studies, evaluation studies, household surveys, etc. It tries to assess where the 6-14 age children are and whether the position has changed since 1986. An effort is made to understand developments in states as well and to see what is it that is keeping children out. The last decade has seen a very strong articulation of a demand for education from the poorest households. Even low cost local functional initiatives have attracted children in large numbers, in spite of a series of bad rainfall years. Poor parents perceive value in education and are willing to make adjustments to support their children, including girls, in schools. The demand for basic education facility in every habitation has become a symbol of social assertion with hitherto unprivileged communities demanding a school of their own however under-funded it may be. Travelling in the remote corners of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Jharkhand, one is struck by the enthusiasm in the community for local education, low cost, local teacher run facility. Tribal girls in a Balika Shikshan Shivir in Baran district of Rajasthan, tribal girls from the KBK districts of Orissa in low cost hostels, child labour in Back to School camps of MV

Foundation in Andhra Pradesh, the community enthusiasm for special summer camps for reading skills for urban deprived children by Pratnaam in Mumbai, Delhi and other cities, all tell a tale of community assertion for quality schooling. Is the state responding adequately? Are mind sets changing? Are adequate resources being provided matched with effective decentralization and school autonomy? Are the demands of poor people for quality education being reflected in national and state level resource allocation? Do poor people really matter?

Placed below are findings on basic education from studies undertaken in the 1986-2003 period. They raise issues around where we are and what is it that explains non-participation.

FINDINGS ON BASIC EDUCATION

1986-2003

Survey year, sample size, coverage	Main findings
1986-87 <i>4th Round National Sample Survey</i> <i>49681 households surveyed all over India</i>	13.79% males and 69.23% females in rural areas aged six and above never enrolled in any educational institution. The comparable figures for urban areas was 17.15 and 36.31 respectively It is somewhat striking to note that "not interested" is as much a major cause for never getting enrolled in an educational institution as for discontinuance of studies in the middle of a course. While about 50% of the men do not go to school for economic reasons, participation in domestic work is a significant reason for the women to keep away from school In rural areas 17.61% males and 68.38% females were non-literate. Only 6.52% male and 1.98% males had reached in the C secondary and above in rural areas. Five* Enrolled female SC/ST. Other who discontinued at Primary level reveals social group wise levels of drop out Andhra Pradesh drop out at Primary level in rural areas for ST girls was 100% for SC girls was 82.81% and for other girls was 71.63% Bihar drop out at Primary level in rural areas for SC girls was 100%, for ST girls was 49.64% and for other girls was 78.51% Kerala drop out at Primary level for ST girls was 64.16%, for SC girls was 38.50% and for other girls was 33.03%
1992-93 <i>First National Family Health Survey</i>	6.5% 6-4 age children attending schools - 78.2% boys and 55.9% girls overall 6-14%
1994 <i>India - Human Development Report - 33,000 Household survey over 16 States of India, National Council of Applied Economic Research, NCER</i>	The enrolment rate for rural India as a whole is 71 percent with a gender disparity of 0.84 showing a deficit of 16% for girls. Enrollment is generally high in the southern and western states with low gender disparity. Though the lowest enrolment was found in Bihar (59 Percent), Rajasthan stands out both with regard to low levels of enrolment (61 percent) and a high level of gender disparity. Landless wage earners, SCs, SCs, and Muslims, and villages with low development, have very low levels of school enrolment. Enrollment rates were

	<p>lowest in households in which there was no adult literate male or female, 54 percent for boys and 36 percent for girls. Ever Enrollment Rates for SCs, STs, and Muslim was 62%.</p>
1995-96 <i>52nd Round National Sample Survey</i> <i>4307 rural households and 2980 urban households were surveyed all over India</i>	<p>78% of the population of age 5-24 years has never attended educational institutions at all. Another 23% of persons in the age group 5-24 years are currently not attending educational institutions though they were enrolled in the past. Of them more than 90% had dropped out before completing schooling, 21% dropping out without completing even the primary level and another 29% dropping out before completing the middle level, etc. Half of the population of the age group 5-24 is currently participating in the formal education system. The average private expenditure per student per annum works out to Rs. 501 at primary level, Rs. 915 at middle level, Rs. 1577 at Secondary/Higher Secondary level and Rs. 2623 at College level.</p> <p>For the population 15 years and above, the over all illiteracy rate is 45.7%. It is 53.6% in rural population as against 23.0% in urban population. There is also wide disparity between males and females. Among males, illiteracy rate is 32.7% and among females it is 59.3%. Among urban males, the illiteracy rate is 14.3% and among rural females it is 68.3%. The rural-urban, male-female disparities accentuates as one moves up the educational ladder. At the post-graduate level, there are 25 persons per 1000 among urban males, 14 among urban females, 4 among rural males and just 1 among rural females.</p> <p>Gross Attendance Ratio for Classes I-V is 85% and for Classes VI-VIII is 65%.</p> <p>Age Specific Attendance Ratio for age 6-10 is 69% and for age 11-13 is 72%.</p> <p>Net Attendance Ratio for Classes I-V is 66% and for Classes VI-VIII is 43%.</p> <p>Of the 5-24 age group students, 52% are in primary, 24% in Middle, 19% in Secondary/Higher Secondary and only 4% in Higher Education. 6.8% students were getting scholarships, 25.6% were getting free or subsidised books, 17.9% were getting mid-day meals.</p> <p>268 persons out of every 1000 persons of age 5-24 years have never been enrolled in any educational institution. In rural areas, the number is 315 and in urban it is 120. Among males it is 201 and among females it is 342. Among rural females it is as high as 406. When we compare across age groups, we see that as we move from 15-24 years to 14-17 and further to 11-14 there is decline in the proportion of never enrolled which is an encouraging sign. The trend, however, changes when we move to the 6-10 age group. This is because of the late entry of children in educational system. Quite a good proportion of children ages 6-7 etc., who are currently not enrolled do join schools later.</p> <p><i>Gross Attendance Ratio is lower than Gross Enrollment Ratio especially for Classes I – where the difference is about 20%. It is possible that the official enrollment gets over stated compared to the actual attendance.</i></p>
1996 <i>Probe Survey</i> <i>Public Report on Basic Education in India</i> <i>Covered 1021 households in 188 villages in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and 48 villages and 154 households in Himachal Pradesh.</i>	<p>70 percent of all children aged 6-14 in the sample households in PROBE States (Bihar, MP, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) are currently enrolled in a school. This is an encouraging trend, considering that out of school children made up four-fifths of the 5-14 age group in the PROBE States as recently as 1986-87. However, this trend has to be read in the light of the fact that (1) 'nominal enrolment' is a common and possibly growing practice, and (2) even among genuinely-enrolled children, attendance rates are often low.</p> <p>The PROBE Survey found plenty of evidence of the rapid progress of schooling in Himachal Pradesh. In this state, 48 villages (located in seven districts) were surveyed, and 154 households were interviewed. Among 285 children aged 6-12 in the sample households, only five had never been to school, and the proportion currently attending school was as high as 97 percent for boys and 95 for girls.</p> <p>The fact that true drop-out rates are, in all likelihood, much lower than the official estimates is good news. However, this finding has to be read in the light</p>

	<p>of the fact that many schools practice 'automatic promotion' of children from one class to the next. Some of them learn very little in the process.</p>
1998-99 <i>Second National Family Health Survey Covered 9000000 households in 30 States</i>	<p>49% of the population aged 6 and above are literate but have not completed primary school. 27 per cent have completed primary school or middle school but not high school and 11 per cent have covered at least High School. Even among the population aged 26-39, only 31% have completed High School. Delhi, Kerala, Gujarat, Punjab are the only States where more than one in five females have completed at least high school. 56% boys and 42% girls in the 15-19 age group had completed elementary education.</p> <p>79% of children aged 6-14 are attending school. Among children aged 15-17, however, the school attendance rate is only 49%, indicating a high rate of school drop out.</p> <p>For both boys and girls, the cost of schooling is the most frequently mentioned reason for never attending school and the child's lack of interest in studies is the most frequently mentioned reason for no currently attending school.</p>
1999 <i>State surveys in the A. Vaidyamathan and P.R. Gopinath Nair States</i>	<p>State specific findings</p> <p>MP and Maharashtra</p> <p>Households with never enrolled persons have less land and lower per capita consumption, depend more on labour for their living and have a markedly higher proportion of SCs/STs.</p> <p>Uttaranchal</p> <p>The educational status of 5-4 year old children varies across occupation groups. Enrolment rates are the highest among male children of cultivator households and the lowest among labourers. But, somewhat surprisingly, female enrolment ratios are the lowest among cultivators and the highest among labourers. The steady increase in the number of non-enrolled children with increasing number of animals is another noteworthy feature. Enrolment rates among the males and females are the lowest among SCs and their drop out rates are the highest. Caste differentials among the SCs in both respects are also much more pronounced. The upper castes have come close to achieving universal elementary education.</p> <p>Madhya Pradesh</p> <p>The proportion of children currently enrolled among the poor, the middle and the well-to-do families (as judged by investigator's ratings) was 63.6%, 81.2% and 73% respectively. Enrolment ratios across the caste groups are not markedly different.</p> <p>Kerala</p> <p>Discrimination of the girl child is no longer in evidence in 3 of the villages, all of which are muslim dominated, enrolment ratios and grade attainment rates were higher for girls, and in two villages, drop out rates for girls were also lower.</p> <p>Tamil Nadu</p> <p>Parental education and household prosperity important in determining school differentials. Differences in educational access on the basis of gender and, to a lesser extent, on the basis of caste are observed.</p> <p>Uttar Pradesh</p> <p>Rampur's educational performance was poorer than Ballia's despite being economically more prosperous. SCs fared better than the muslims and OBCs in Rampur. Crucial importance of public action at the local level.</p> <p>Orissa</p> <p>There are significant differences between socio-groups in enrolment and completion. The mean literacy rate for population aged 7 years and above ranges from 16% in a Koraput village to 70% in a Puri village in the survey. The mean for the selected villages of Koraput district (31.5%) is almost half that of Puri district (59%).</p>

2001 <i>Dhir, Bhagwan and Jyotsna Jha's study on Elementary Education for the poor or most deprived groups</i> <i>Carried out in some of the poorest parts of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Assam, MP, UP, Gujarat, Karnataka, AP and Maharashtra, covering 1077 households, 2190 children and 87 schools in rural and urban areas</i>	<p><i>Less than two thirds (64.4%) of children in the age group 6-13 are currently enrolled in schools. Only about 65% of the total enrolled children regularly attend school. Regularity among enrolled students is relatively high in the southern and eastern areas of the country.</i></p> <p><i>Notable inter-village differences exist in both enrolment and regularity in all the districts.</i></p> <p><i>Although Dalits emerge as one of the most educationally deprived social groups in terms of children's school participation, there exist large intra-group variations within them. At one end, in villages like Karandu in Maharashtra and Doddatapur in Karnataka, more than 90% of Dalit children regularly attend school. At the other, in villages like Sultana in UP and Doriya in Bihar, barely 20 to 25% of Dalit children attend school regularly.</i></p>
2001-2002 <i>HM Studies in eight Phase I DPEP States</i> <i>Study carried out in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Assam and Kerala. Study based on 30 villages in two districts of the selected States, household surveys of all 5-13 age children.</i>	<p>State specific findings:</p> <p>Maharashtra: In 2001, there were 2% non-enrolled children, with little social and gender difference. Overall completion rate for children in Aurangabad is close to 80% and in Osmanabad it is 74%. In Aurangabad, attendance of ST boys and girls is lower than that of General category and SC boys and girls. While in Osmanabad all the groups seem to have uniform attendance, higher than 86%.</p> <p>Karnataka: The total 'non-enrolled' proportion is negligible and there is absence of social disparities in 'non-enrolment'. Very marginal difference across gender and social groups in completion, as well. Repetition Rates have fallen, both for boys and girls over time, in the lower primary classes, and the difference between boys and girls in either direction, appear to be very marginal. Belgaum had 74% completion rate and Mandya 90%.</p> <p>Tamil Nadu: Attendance Rates have improved and drop out rates reduced. Most of the drop out occurred during the first two grades, accounting for more than 80% of all drop outs. Very few children were identified as out of school in the survey covering 2650 households. Most of the nearly 1% disabled children are also school going. Attendance Rates are in the 80 plus range for all social groups and across gender. Cuddalore had higher than 85% completion rate while Dharmapuri had over 60% completion.</p> <p>Assam: Almost 95% of the Hindu households in the age group 6-9 years are enrolled in schools in Morigaon district, and the corresponding figure for Darrang district is about 85%. In the case of Muslim households, the corresponding figures for Morigaon and Darrang are districts are about 85% and 82% respectively. Only 21.58% of the original stock completes 4 grades in 4 years' time.</p> <p>Madhya Pradesh: Household survey revealed that both Betul and Siddhi have 52.48 proportion of boys and girls in the surveyed sample villages. Betul and Siddhi have 93.34 and 92.24 percent children attending schools. Grade Completion Ratios are in the 60% range. Though there are no significant gender or social differences.</p> <p>Haryana: Grade Completion Rate is higher for Grade III than for Grade V. Gap between boys and girls is more pronounced at Class V than at Class III level.</p> <p>Chhattisgarh: Grade Completion Ratio is unsatisfactory both for boys and girls as 40% villages</p>

	<p>India reported 0.6 GCR for girls and 50% villages have reported 0.6 GCR for boys.</p> <p>Kerala:</p> <p>In a survey of 352 families, there were 120 children who were out of school. Attendance rates is more than 90%. The lowest attendance rate was with regard to ST students. The Grade Completion ratio is a little below 80%.</p>
<p>2001 Census</p> <p><i>A complete enumeration of all households in the country</i></p>	<p>For the first time the total number of non-literate has come down in absolute numbers – from 328 million to 296 million. AP, UP, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, MP and Tamil Nadu significantly contributed to this decrease. Number of non-literates increased in Bihar.</p> <p>Male literacy in 2001 is 75.85% and female literacy is 59.16%. Overall 65.38%.</p> <p>Male-female literacy gap has come down to 21.70% from 24.84 in 1991.</p> <p>Jammu and Kashmir, Rajasthan, AP, MP, Chhattisgarh, UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya have literacy rates below the national average.</p> <p>The States that gained more than 15 percentage points in literacy in 1991-2001 are Rajasthan (22.48), Chhattisgarh (22.27), Madhya Pradesh (19.14), Andhra Pradesh (17.02) and Uttar Pradesh (16.65).</p>
<p>2002</p> <p><i>Vimala Ramachandran's study in three States</i></p> <p><i>Based on six villages and six urban settlements in UP, AP and Karnataka</i></p>	<p><i>The relation between health and education is often perceived as a one way street, with most discussions focusing on the role education can play in facilitating health awareness and improving the health status of individuals and communities. Usually left out of the debate is the critical and reciprocal link between health and education, specifically in relation to children, whereby poor healthy and nutrition work as a barrier to attendance and educational attainment achievement. Children do not receive adequate nutrition</i></p> <p>Most children in the surveyed households are enrolled. Many of them are also attending school, with varying degrees of regularity.</p> <p>Discussions with children revealed that most do not eat anything in the morning, especially girls who have little time, given their morning chores. On most days almost 10 to 15 percent of children (majority of them being girls) come to school without eating.</p> <p>Another significant factor that emerged is one of changing social norms with regard to schooling. Discussions in rural Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh revealed that sending children to school has become a community norm. This is yet to fully emerge in Uttar Pradesh.</p>
<p>2003 January to April</p> <p><i>Jean Dreze and Saranya Goyal</i></p> <p><i>Centre for Equity Studies</i></p> <p><i>The Future of Mid Day Meals</i></p> <p><i>Survey of 81 villages in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Northern Karnataka</i></p>	<p>Only 5 of 81 sample schools reported occasional gaps in the provision of mid day meals. Pupil enrolment in Class – I rose by 15% in the sample villages after mid day meals were introduced. The surge in Class – I enrolment is twice as large for girls (19%) as for boys (10%). In most of the sample schools children of different social backgrounds happily share a common meal. Frugal lunch menus have severely diluted the nutrition impact of mid day meals.</p>

The following conclusions can be arrived at from the assessments above:

Firstly, the position with regard to school participation was absolutely abysmal in 1986, at the time of the 42nd Round National Sample Survey. The fact that 42.79% males and as high as 69.23% females never enrolled in any educational institution in rural areas is a severe indictment of the efforts made for basic education in the first

four decades of independence. Clearly elementary education, in spite of being a professed Directive Principle of State Policy with a ten year time frame, did not receive the attention that it deserved in most of the States. Drop out rate of 100 % for tribal girls in Andhra Pradesh and dalit girls in Bihar at the primary stage in rural areas is a severe indictment of policies of social justice and gender equity followed in the first forty years after independence. The fact that only 6.52% males and 1.98% females in rural areas had reached matric in 1986-87 confirms the poor completion of primary and upper primary education in rural areas.

Secondly, there has been a significant decline in the number of out of school children in the 1986-2003 period, even though rates of successful completion still leave much to be desired, especially at the upper primary stage. In spite of the decline in the number of out of school children, completion rates at primary, upper primary and secondary level indicate large gaps in gender and among social groups, in most of the States. These gaps are larger in the not so well performing states in eastern and northern India and lower in the better performing southern and western parts of India. School participation of girls in general and from the minority community in particular, dalit and tribal children continue to be much lower than for general categories in states like Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Orissa. Districts like Malkangiri in Orissa, Patamu in Jharkhand, Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh, Banswara in Rajasthan, Kishanganj in Bihar, Sonebhadra in Uttar Pradesh, with their very high incidence of poverty and impoverishment, also have large gender and social gaps in school participation. On the other hand, these gaps, at least on enrolment and school participation, have been significantly bridged in districts like Gadchiroli in Maharashtra, Bellary in North Karnataka, Panchmahal in Gujarat, Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, Mallapuram in Kerala, among others. Recent efforts to expand access to schools in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan has led to increased participation in remote habitations in the schooling process. It is still not clear whether the increased participation will sustain without incremental improvements in the provisioning for the low cost schools established in these regions.

Thirdly, the gains in enrolment do not still show substantially in gains in grade completion rates, though some improvement is discernible in states like Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Haryana. The policy of no detention in most states masks the real transition from class to class as it could be a case of children moving on in class without learning

adequately, an issue that will be examined more closely in the next section. The discrepancy between Gross Enrolment Rates published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India and the Gross Attendance Rate, brought out by the 52nd Round of the National Sample Survey 1995-96, highlights the need to take enrolment figures with caution. Jyotsna Jha and Dhriti Jhingran's study on the poorest districts also highlights the ease of irregular attendance of those who are enrolled, in the light of no detention policies at the primary stage in most states, perhaps the real measure of Grade Completion will be assessment of achievement rather than a mere transition from class to class.

Fourthly, the household surveys bring out the strong community demand for basic education. The poorest of the poor households want quality education for their children and there is ample indication of an aspirations revolution among the poor. What is failing them is an unprepared or an under prepared schooling in meeting the diverse learning needs of all these children. It is the private costs of schooling and non-functional schools that keep children away rather than any large scale incidence of child labour. Vimla Ramachandran's study brings out how schooling of boys and girls has become a social norm in states like Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh but not quite in Uttar Pradesh as yet (2002).

Fifthly, states are clearly at different stages in their efforts to provide eight years of elementary schooling to all children. There are states like Kerala, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Mizoram, Kerala, where nearly all the children have reached school and are remaining in school for many years. There are others like Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, where most children have started going to Class I / II but it is still not clear whether the low cost, habitation specific schooling facility will be able to meet the goal of primary completion. There are still others like Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh, where, some recent efforts notwithstanding, a very significant number of children continue to be out of school.

Sixthly, income, gender and social group continues to matter in terms of school participation and completion, though the scenario is changing very rapidly. Substantial number of children coming to Government / Local Body schools are from the hitherto under privileged social groups SCs/STs/OBCs/minorities. It is a different matter that completion rates and participation in higher levels of education indicate a continuing gender and social gap.

Seventhly, there seems to be a major gain in the last few years in enrolments in States like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Orissa and even Bihar. Recent studies on Rajasthan, North Karnataka, and Chhattisgarh, reveal significant improvement in girls' enrolment on account of among other factors, not cooked meals. It is also a fact that a large number of initiatives in elementary education are being currently attempted and they too have had an impact on school participation. With the elections to Panchayats with reservation for women, SC, ST and OBC, and proposed devolution of powers to them, there has been a greater sense of ownership of institutions like the school/ alternate schooling facilities by the hitherto under privileged social groups. There is a social assertion by these groups, reflecting in habitation specific schools and greater school participation. The Table below tries to capture some of the change:

IMPROVEMENT IN SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OF 6-14 AGE GIRLS

States	6-14 age girls attending schools 1992-93 (NFHS - I)	6-14 age girls attending schools 1998-99 (NFHS II)	Difference
Andhra Pradesh	54.8%	70.5%	15.7
Assam	66.0%	75.0%	9.0
Bihar	38.3%	54.1%	15.8
Gujarat	68.4%	72.8%	4.4
Haryana	74.7%	85.5%	10.8
Karnataka	64.4%	77.6%	13.2
Kerala	94.8%	97.4%	2.6
Madhya Pradesh	54.8%	70.8%	16.0
Maharashtra	76.6%	86.9%	10.3
Orissa	62.0%	75.1%	13.1
Punjab	77.8%	90.0%	12.2
Rajasthan	40.6%	63.2%	22.6
Tamil Nadu	78.7%	88.5%	9.8
Uttar Pradesh	48.2%	69.4%	21.2
West Bengal	62.9%	76.7%	13.8

Source - NFHS - I and NFHS - II (1992-93 and 1998-99)

ARE THE CHILDREN LEARNING?

This Section will look at whether or not children are learning what is expected of them. There could be three ways of making the assessment - findings of achievement

studies and classroom assessments assessing completion rates at various levels, assessing what percentage move up to higher education. Independent studies by Vimla Ramachandran in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh has pointed out how children in Class III/IV in many of the schools surveyed could hardly read or write. Pratham's work in urban area schools in Maharashtra, Delhi, Patna, Vadodara, etc. also pointed out the inability of a large number of boys and girls in primary classes to read and write simple sentences. The policy of no detention followed by most state governments at the primary level often conceals the actual progress of pupils as, irrespective of their achievement, children are promoted. The Tables below try to capture the reality of children learning.

PERFORMANCE IN CLASS IV/V AND CLASS VII/VIII TESTS

PERCENTAGE OF BOYS AND GIRLS SECURING MORE THAN 60% MARKS

STATE	IV/V BOYS	IV/V GIRLS	VII/VIII BOYS	VII/VIII GIRLS
Andhra Pradesh	59.90	59.13	52.62	51.75
Assam	21.17	18.52	14.72	13.09
Bihar	32.14	31.86	23.87	24.00
Gujarat	53.88	54.29	59.07	63.27
Haryana	29.89	30.13	6.40	17.50
Uttarakhand	44.91	46.55	16.98	19.04
Jharkhand	22.89	22.60	19.97	20.19
Karnataka	50.27	50.19	44.76	48.98
Kerala	38.90	42.85	52.92	41.16
Madhya Pradesh	23.73	23.05	18.99	21.96
Maharashtra	65.6	62.38	25.34	26.98
Orissa	10.50	9.52	12.17	11.93
Rajasthan	80.50	51.22	46.97	48.48
Tamil Nadu	41.64	47.63	24.95	26.69
Uttar Pradesh	39.34	38.79	32.56	36.70
Uttarakhand	10.73	26.05	24.22	23.95
West Bengal	40.21	38.40	23.21	21.40

Source:

DPLP 2002 Report, Chapter: Universal access and retention: Yash Aggarwal

MEAN ACHIEVEMENT SCORES OF CLASS - IV STUDENTS

State/district	Mean Achievement Score in Language for Boys, Class - IV	Mean Achievement Score in language for girls, Class - IV	Mean Achievement Score in Mathematics for boys, Class - IV	Mean Achievement Score in Mathematics for girls, Class - IV
Haryana				
Jind	58.85	58.93	46.82	46.35
Kanthal	45.30	50.66	40.31	48.19
Chhattisgarh				
Bilaspur	53.88	50.22	41.59	38.20
Raigarh	50.13	46.06	35.17	53.93
Maharashtra				
Petul	56.09	67.53	62.09	61.76
Dhar	89.91	59.33	48.13	46.0
Tamil Nadu				

Dharmapuri	71.46	69.93	61.50	60.69
Villupuram	68.00	67.56	62.28	61.49

Source: Student Achievement under TAS: An Appraisal in Phase – I DPD, P States 2000 – NCERT/ MHRD.

THE DROPPING ENROLMENT SCENARIO

Class	Boys (in millions)	Girls (in millions)	Total (in millions)
Class - I	17.1	16.4	30.5
Class - II	13.4	16.4	23.8
Class - III	12.0	9.6	21.6
Class - IV	11.0	8.6	19.6
Class - V	10.2	7.8	18.0
Class - VI	9.4	6.6	16.0
Class - VII	8.3	5.9	14.2
Class - VIII	7.6	5.9	13.6
Class - IX	6.2	5.0	11.2
Class - X	5.4	3.4	8.8
Class - XI	2.4	1.6	4.0
Class - XII	2.1	1.4	3.5

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2000-2001 (As on 30 September 2000)

WHERE DO THEY GO

Course	Boys (in Lakhs)	Girls (in Lakhs)	Total (in Lakhs)
Teacher Training Schools	0.57	0.60	1.17
Polytechnic Institutes	3.15	0.80	3.95
Technical Industrial Arts and Crafts Schools	1.08	0.68	4.76
MBBS	0.86	0.66	1.43
BI/BSc/B.Arch.	3.25	0.93	4.18
B.Ed./BT	0.70	0.51	1.12

Source: Selected Educational Statistics 2000-2001

From the tables above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

Firstly, the performance of boys and girls in schools are dismal, considering that a large number of them complete Class IV/V with less than 60 percent marks. While marks are not necessarily the best indicator of children's performance, it does tend to indicate whether learning is taking place in a school or not. Most children completing primary classes with less than 60 percent marks are unlikely to complete Middle/Secondary level schooling as the academic load considerably increases at these stages. Low mean achievement scores also indicate serious learning lacunae as most children continue to achieve far below mastery levels in tests. It indicates major gaps in understanding levels of children. Since knowledge is incremental and depends a lot on clarity of concepts at the primary stage, most of these children are likely to have serious problems in coping with the demands of the school system at the higher levels.

Secondly, the confirmation of children not learning enough is also deduced from the dropping enrolment scenario with there being 30.5 million children in Class - I and only 3.5 million continuing up to Class - XII. Even after assuming underage

enrolments in Class – I, the dropping out is very significant and reflects the low learning taking place in the system. Most of the children are not completing the grades for which they enrolled. The 52nd Round of the National Sample Survey 1995 – 96 had pointed out that 27% of the 15 – 24 age persons had never attended any educational institution. Another 23% in the same age group were not currently attending, though they were enrolled in the past. Of them more than 90 percent had dropped out before completing schooling, 21% dropping out without completing the primary level and another 29% dropping out before completing the middle level. Most children reach the age of 24 having failed at some level of schooling – primary, upper primary, secondary, higher secondary.

Thirdly, even though children are reported progressing within the primary classes on account of a policy of no detention, in practice little learning is taking place. The experience of Class – III and Class – IV children not being able to read and write simple sentences has been a finding in many studies and surely something is seriously wrong with the learning outcomes among children. Many schools do not emphasise reading skills and this compromises the ability of children to develop mastery in language and mathematics. Besides being a proof of effective learning, reading skills is also a very important pedagogic tool in improving understanding for future learning.

Fourthly, assessment of the provisions of learning at the post basic education level, especially for those not able to cope with the rigours of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education, seem grossly inadequate. The provision for higher learning seems to be much more in the domain of those who complete Higher Secondary Education successfully rather than those who are declared failures of the system. This explains a lot of the depression among adolescents and the mad craze for tuition shops that promise jobs. The Indian education system allows for individual excellence but does not seem to meet the needs of mass level skill formation and development as required.

Fifthly, while the issue of relevance of basic education has been debated since the colonial days, especially with the Gandhian thrust on ‘swavalamban’ (self-reliance) and ‘samvaya’ (integration of physical and mental development), there is not enough evidence from states of progress towards a more relevant basic education that allows for improved mastery over nature – learning by observation, learning by doing, and most of all learning for life. While the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan makes learning for life

a stated objective of the programme, it will have to be seen how far it is able to take the debate on education for life rather than mere literacy and numeracy skills.

Sixthly, there appears to be a curriculum load at each level. Children are increasingly finding coping with the academic load difficult. It is not at all unusual to see a large number of students at various levels seeking private tutors outside school hours. Private tuition has really emerged as an industry, given the high motivation of many parents for individual excellence. High curriculum load works against first and second generation learners, as it necessarily requires home support, which is completely absent in a large number of households. The practice of homework, therefore, ends up as one of the most iniquitous arrangements when first and second generation children are involved.

III

OPERATIONALIZING THE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEE OF RIGHT TO EDUCATION - ISSUES OF RESOURCE CRUNCH AND STATE COMMITMENT

The last decade has seen a very strong articulation of a demand for education from the poorest households. Even low cost local functional initiatives have attracted children in large numbers, in spite of a series of bad rainfall years. Poor parents perceive value in education and are willing to make adjustments to support their children, including girls, in schools. The demand for basic education facility in every habitation has become a symbol of social assertion with hitherto unprivileged communities demanding a school of their own, however under - funded it may be. Travelling in the remote corners of Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Jharkhand, one is struck by the enthusiasm in the community for local education, low cost, local teacher run facility. Tribal girls in a Balika Shikshan Shivir in Baran district of Rajasthan, tribal girls from the KBK districts of Orissa in low cost hostels, child labour in Back to School camps of MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh, the community enthusiasm for special summer camps for reading skills for urban deprived children by Pratham in Mumbai, Delhi and other cities, all tell a tale of community assertion for quality schooling. Is the state responding adequately? Are mind sets changing? Are adequate resources being provided matched with effective

decentralization and school autonomy? Are the demands of poor people for quality education being reflected in national and state level resource allocation? Do poor people really matter?

Clearly, the formal system is taking a long time to improve its accountability. Education administrators are still grappling with effective and efficient management of schools, very reluctant to shed powers to elected representatives and School Committees. Transfer of teachers, deployment of teachers against fake enrolments, non-accountability of school systems to local people, continue to be in the mystified domain of powerful bureaucracies. Decentralization is paid lip-service when it comes to shedding powers over teachers and schools. Transparency is shunned and corruption reigns supreme in many States in matters like teacher appointment and deployment. Teachers continue to dodge processes of local accountability and Sarpanches manage to keep communities away from exercising greater control over schools. Parents Teachers Associations and elected School Education Committees have stepped in to demand improved schools but their voice is often drowned in the fathomless educational bureaucracy. Teacher development and establishment of institutions of excellence to support this process at Cluster, Block, District and State levels is still weak in many States, these institutions often being seen as dumping ground for those unwanted as Education Administrators or preferred options for those teachers not wanting to teach at remote locations. Will we ever achieve the goals of SSA if we did not focus on the reform and decentralization agenda, the school autonomy and institutional development thrust? The answer is an emphatic no. But then this is what the framework of SSA expects States to initiate and adopt. The challenge of SSA is to change mind set of education bureaucracies and teachers, to make them responsible for meeting the learning needs of all children after providing all the resources at their command to do so. The challenge is to create basic minimum learning conditions for all children in all schools/learning centres/ all habitations.

The apathy of the State reflects in the slow pace of effective decentralization and community control for local level accountability of the school system. With the proliferation of the private unaided schools and the parental preference for such schools, government funded schools today are catering largely to the poor. Any significant improvement in their performance therefore, will have very positive consequences for poverty reduction. The withdrawal of children of the elite from the government schools has also led to its decline as those charged with maintaining

government schools do not suffer if the school functions irregularly or ineffectively. Given the political clout of the teaching community in many States, any efforts at making them locally accountable are resisted fiercely, often with success. The choice before the political and bureaucratic elite today is whether to side with an unaccountable school system or to ensure that poor children get quality education through well-endowed and effectively managed government schools. The Kendriya Vidyalayas, the Navodaya Vidyalayas, the specially endowed schools in some States, are all examples suggesting that government funded schools can also be well endowed.

The starting point for SSA has been an intensive habitation based household survey to ascertain where the under fourteen age children are. These Household survey forms, stitched together, is expected to form the Education Register, to be available in the local school. This Register, prepared in collaboration with local communities, has to be annually updated to record the progress of children in the school system. Community owned School Registers are already being maintained in Madhya Pradesh with very effective outcomes, under the supervision of the Rajiv Gandhi Mission. Habitation planning is a reality in Andhra Pradesh. Periodic household surveys are the norm under Rajasthan's 'Shiksha Aapke Dwaar' programme. Many Chief Ministers have expressed a strong political will to honour the right to education through community contact programmes, special interventions, and over all support for universal elementary education. The Constitutional amendment making elementary education a fundamental right and the comprehensive SSA programme is an opportunity for States to move towards honouring the right to elementary education. It is not simply a resource issue; it is equally important a reform issue as well as no amount of resources will be a substitute to a fundamental change in the mind sets of those who currently control and manage school systems.

There surely are many signs of hope. Involvement of elected representatives of Panchayats and parents of children in schools has surely increased in most States. The Hon'ble Supreme Court's intervention for hot cooked meals is having the right impact with more States complying with its instructions. There are more resources available at school level to meet the contingent needs of teaching learning materials, school repairs and maintenance, and petty grants. New textbooks are available to most students, mostly on time. School facilities have improved with the thrust on VEC led school construction efforts. Government and local body school look more attractive

these days than ever before on account of school maintenance support and large scale low cost teaching materials have been developed, though not adequately used in many schools, through teacher and school grants. Teacher development programmes have increased and in many States, Block and Cluster Resource Centres have started functioning effectively for teacher support. Household and school surveys have generated enthusiasm in teaching the cut off school children. A diversity of interventions like residential and non residential bridge courses for 9-14 age children have made it possible to provide for age specific mainstreaming of older children who are out of school. Education Guarantee Schools and other forms alternate schooling in unserved habitations has led to an access revolution of sorts, however ill equipped and under funded the initiative may be.

Large scale recruitment of locally selected but generally Higher Secondary pass teachers at lower than pay scale, has become a reality, even in States like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, even though teacher vacancies continue to be staggering in some of the educationally backward States. While there can be no alternative to a well paid and well trained teacher in the long run, the evidence in the short run indicates that low emoluments are not coming in the way of teacher effectiveness. SSA norms of a teacher for a group of 40 children, primary schools where numbers justify their conversion from alternative forms, Upper Primary Schools as per need, possible interventions for all disabled children, preparation of ten year perspective District Elementary Education Plans reflecting the uncovered gaps for universalization, are all sending very strong messages of the right to elementary education as never before. Surely, we live in times of change, times of demand for quality elementary education from the poorest households. While SSA is a minimalist programme for guaranteeing basic learning conditions, nothing prevents the Central government and States from adding on to the framework in the context of special needs. The National Programme for Girls Education in the over 2000 Educationally Backward Blocks, and the proposed Residential Schools for girls in remote regions, are examples of how there has been a conscious effort to add on to the norms. The idea of setting up a General Council for Elementary Education under the Prime Minister, with representation of a few State Chief Minister, with all powers within the Budgets allocated for elementary education, was precisely to move norm based planning to more need based planning. In many ways, a norm based planning process is a starting point for more effective need based planning. Even when the bulk of expenditure under SSA is for improving

the formal school. A lot of the criticism is about promoting alternative under funded learning centres. There are instances where SSA funds are actually being used to strengthen the alternative learning centre and develop it into a well endowed formal school.

The sobering thought is that both on reform and resource, we need to move much faster. The Government's own assessment of resources in the financial memorandum to Parliament for the Constitutional Amendment Bill to make elementary education a fundamental right was Rupees 98,000 crores over ten years. Even this commitment is not being honoured in the annual allocations, significant increases notwithstanding, and is a serious cause of concern as the Parliament had approved the amendment, including the financial memorandum. All arguments of fiscal constraints vanish in thin air as ultimately it is a matter of priority, a matter whether elementary education of poor children really matters. It is mostly poor children who throng government/local body schools and all efforts at their improvement are directly pro-poor. For a nation striving for global eminence, eight years of quality schooling for all is the minimum requirement for sustainably enhancing human capital and banishing poverty.

There is a strong case for further improving the resources for schools to ensure that all children, from diverse backgrounds, get an opportunity to learn. The Yashpal Committee had made a strong argument for a teacher for a group of thirty children. There is clearly a strong argument that the hardest to reach children, belonging to the poorest of households, require a stronger commitment of financial resources, for their effective participation. The recent emphasis of the Hon'ble Supreme Court on serving Hot Cooked Meals in schools, setting up of ICDS centres in every habitation, are steps in the right direction, requiring higher resource commitments for these sectors. In the light of experiences in the field, there could be a case for modification to norms of SSA. The General Council under the Prime Minister, approved for SSA, has all the powers within the Budgets of the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy to innovate and modify norms. Initiatives for girls in the over 2000 Educationally Backward Blocks, provision for Residential Schools for girls in remote regions under the Kasturba Gandhi Swantantra Vidyalaya Programme, will all add to the diversity of interventions to improve participation of poor children.

The Common Minimum Programme of the newly elected government is promising with its emphasis on livelihood and wage guarantees for the poor, hot

cooed meals for children in primary and secondary schools and interventions to improve investments in the basic education and health sector through imposition of a cess on taxes. Creation of basic learning conditions to meet diverse learning needs of all children, requires greater flexibility for need based planning. Norm based initiatives are a first step in moving towards a rights based perspective. Effective realization of the goal of UEE of satisfactory quality for all would require even greater diversity of approaches.

Resource alone, however, is only part of the solution. Reforms to effectively decentralize down to school level, allow for local initiatives, make communities manage the affairs of the school, encourage transparency and social audit, focus on institutional capacity development for quality and excellence, and most of all, develop an accountable public system of schooling. Effective decentralization is inconceivable without a strong emphasis on micro-planning and habitation based planning. Communities ought to have the right to plan for the educational needs of their children. Broad norms would be acceptable but denying the community a role in planning interventions and expecting it to play a limited role in execution is not the way in which school autonomy and effective decentralization can be nurtured. Much greater investment on developing skills among teachers and community leaders for effective management of schools is required for effective decentralized management. Forms of social audit that allow full transparency in maintenance of school records will be needed if schools have to acquire autonomy in real terms. SSA framework provides the space for a lot of such efforts, only if reform is top on the agenda of States.

The challenge of all children in school, all children learning and completing eight years of elementary schooling by 2010 is indeed a daunting one. It not only requires more resources; it requires major reforms as well. Reforms necessarily question existing power relations. If schools have to exercise more powers, others above in the chain have to be willing to shed powers. Similarly, for institutions (CRC, BRC, DIET, SCERT) to develop as centres of excellence, they have to have transparent selection criteria and clear responsibilities. Large sized bureaucracies often cover up non-performance as the outcome orientation is weak. The challenge, therefore, is to look at a change in power relations in the school system.

The poor are demanding education. Hungry, malnourished faces thronging schools, both in rural and urban areas in enrolment drives in the month of July, is

reason for hope. Not doing enough to keep them in schools will become grounds for despair. Hope never dies in a democracy. Political democracy has really moved in independent India with poor people in very large numbers, participating in elections at all levels. Leaders from hitherto unprivileged communities are today in position of power. It is an opportunity for them to honour their commitment to social justice. Remember, the children not in school are from poor families in rural and urban India, mostly girls and children from dalit, minority and tribal households, eking a living as an agricultural labourer, a migrant labourer, a construction worker, a destitute woman, or a lowly paid seasonal labourer. Even they have demanded quality schooling for their children. Let democracy not fail them.

Educational Deprivation of the Marginalized

A village study of Mushar Community in Bihar

by
Ravi Kumar

Educational Deprivation of the Marginalized

A village study of Mushar Community in Bihar¹

- Ravi Kumar²

EDUCATION INEQUALITY AS A REFLECTION OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY

Education has been always an arena of political and ideological contest. It has been used as the most effective tool of consensus building in society. Hence, there has always been a meta-discourse that impeded the formation and sustenance of any radical ideological position trying to look critically at the social processes. Education, apart from being an instrument of creating knowledge, in informal as well as formal way, came to be treated as an important site of ideological contestation and linked to the struggle for liberation. Karl Marx was one such philosopher who saw it as an instrument used by the ruling class to sustain its hegemony in society. He wrote that

"the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. The individuals composing the ruling class possess among other things consciousness, and therefore think. Insofar, therefore, as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of an epoch, it is self-evident that they do this in its whole range, hence among other things rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch." (Marx: 1968)

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² Associate Fellow, Council for Social Development, New Delhi

In 20th century the Frankfurt School explored and questioned the way ruling ideas of society become more aggressive through their cultural agencies (Adorno, 1991; Marcuse, 1972) and through the techno-bureaucratic mechanisms employed by capitalism. Marcuse showed how the techno rational politics induces and seduces us into doing things through 'a comfortable, smooth, reasonable democratic unfreedom.' He argued that people are deprived of criticality in this society, which is effected by a whole functional dynamics of technology, mass media, cultural symbols, education, etc. making people compulsive consumers (Marcuse, 1972). Thereafter, postmodernism in a variety of forms challenged the notions of a hegemonic meta-knowledge that seeks to undermine the localised 'not-so powerful knowledges'. Foucault observes that

"the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power. The university hierarchy is only the most visible, the most sclerotic and least dangerous form of this phenomenon. One has to be really naïve to imagine that the effects of power linked to knowledge have their culmination in university hierarchies. Diffused, entrenched and dangerous, they operate in other places than in the person of the old professor. ... it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" (Foucault: 1980: 51-52).

Pierre Bourdieu recognized the way power imposes meanings and makes them 'legitimate' through concealing the power relations, which constitutes the basis of 'pedagogic action' that sustains the ruling ideas. He wrote

"In any given social formation the cultural arbitrary which the power relations between the groups or classes making up that social formation put into the dominant position within the system of cultural arbitraries is the one which most fully, though always indirectly expresses the objective interests (material and symbolic) of the dominant groups or classes." (Bourdieu & Passeron: 1990: 9)

Apart from these scholars many others like Michel Apple (1990), Samuel Bowles, Krishna Kumar (1989), Anil Sadgopal (2003, 2004a, 2004b) have argued consistently about the ways in which education is intimately related to the politics in society and, hence, is a field of constant struggle between the dominant discourse and those at the margins. In fact, one aspect that finds space in the discourses on education all along

has been the concern with the educational status of people at the margins looked from class, caste, gender and other perspectives.

Education has been seen as a tool invested with power and therefore as representing the interests of the ruling class. By the virtue of representing the ruling ideas it reproduces the existing inequalities through symbols and cultural notions in order to preserve the status quo. Hence, emerge notions such as "*Mushars do not want to study*", "*They themselves are not interested in their upliftment*" etc. Such 'popular' notions de-legitimize their presence as a section which is neglected by the prevailing education system.

In the Indian context, the thoughts of Gandhi on education, in form of his conception of *Nai Talim*, provided the essential turn to the education discourse linking the social structural aspects with education. Basing his argument on poverty and occupational structure of India he argued that "it is a crime to make education mere literary and to unfit boys and girls for manual work in after-life." Every child must be taught dignity of labour and there "is no reason why a peasants' son after having gone to school should become useless, as he does become, as an agricultural labour" (Gandhi, 1999). For him a child's education would begin by "teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the moment it begins its training." This will not be a training in merely techniques but "the child should know the *why* and the *wherefore* of every process" (Gandhi, 1999).

His notion of Basic Education sought to attain the physical, intellectual and moral development of the child through the medium of a handicraft. It was not conceived as a class work of making an item, for the sake of learning the art but as a productive engagement because otherwise "it will neglect a very important moral principle, viz. that human labour and material should never be used in a wasteful or unproductive way. The emphasis laid on the principle of spending every minute of one's life usefully is the best education for citizenship and incidentally makes Basic Education self sufficient" (Gandhi, 1999). The concept of Basic Education "presents a significant example of the influence of the sociology of knowledge on the school curriculum... In functional terms, the idea was to relate the school to the processes of production in

the local milieu, with the aim of making the school itself a productive institution. In symbolic terms, by proposing the introduction of productive skills and the knowledge associated with them in the curriculum, Gandhi was advocating the allocation of a substantive place in education to systems of knowledge developed by, and associated with, the oppressed groups of Indian society..." (Kumar, 1989). The linking of two hitherto presumably disjointed spheres of 'world of knowledge' and 'world of work' was a new conceptualization.

From the critical concern of knowledge as representing the power relations and as a tool of all round development of the child to the current debates education has traversed a long path. One of the most significant developments of the post-colonial worldview has been the role attributed to State for providing education to the child. The older article 45 of Indian constitution had been a reflection of the same concern. This aspect became more evident ever since education became an intrinsic part of the development debate. The new discourse (put forth by the so called 'development sector') completely glossed over the element of criticality as essential component of education. The only aim that remained has been the target to make everybody literate. The path from 'education' to 'literacy' has been in consonance with the whole development discourse that accompanied it – in terms of 'from state to market'. Gradually, the state is abdicated of its responsibilities and education is no longer seen critically as part of the social system, which reproduces the existing order of things. However, this is never to deny the innumerable discourses that seek to argue that the crisis in education is a part and parcel of the capitalist system, which is more interested in producing uncritical mechanical beings.

Education and the Development Discourse

Education became the paramount agenda ever since its recognition as essential for development of human capital. It came to be seen as an 'enabling' factor that "promote or constraint the freedom that individuals have.. "Education is important if equal economic opportunities are to be provided to humans. But "somehow the educational aspects of economic development have continued to be out of the main focus, and this relative neglect has persisted despite the recent radical changes in

economic policy" (Dreze and Sen: 2002:38). Dreze argues that "literacy is an essential tool of self-defense in a society where social interactions include the written media." It is not only being seen as a tool of facilitating economic opportunities but is also taken as essential "to overcome the traditional inequalities of caste, class and gender, just as the removal of these inequalities contributes to the spread of education" (Dreze, 2003:03).

The documents released by 'international/national development agencies' have constantly been reflecting on the concerns of getting every child into school. Education interpreted in variety of ways is being 'monitored' by bodies like UNICEF and World Bank. Aids are pouring in to expand "opportunities" and "freedoms" of individuals, and enhance their capability. The World Development Report (1999-2000) only added the element of sustainability and equity to the ideas being argued by Amartya Sen and Jean Dreze. The stress is on "accumulation of human capital" through adequate provisions of education, health and nutrition. The World Bank came out with its World Development Report 1998/99 titled *Knowledge for Development*, stressing on knowledge as critical for development. However, while dealing with knowledge it mostly made references to technological know how and defined knowledge as the art to acquire it. The critical space of enquiry, the ultimate objective of any knowledge, which culminates into innovations and development of knowledge stock never became the focus. Citing the example of countries which have been "the vanguard of the world economy", it argued that "today's most technologically advanced economies are truly knowledge-based. And as they generate new wealth from their innovations, they are creating millions of knowledge related jobs in an array of disciplines that have emerged overnight: knowledge engineers, knowledge managers, knowledge coordinators" (World Bank: 1998:16). It asked the international donor agencies to actively participate in knowledge creation and the governments to narrow knowledge gaps through free market, free trade and ensuring competition (Please see Chapters 9 and 10 of the report).

In the search of ultimate development imagery development agencies or bodies concerned with it held that the economic planning is not sufficient unless

supplemented by human resource development, which is viewed as "the process of enlarging people's choices" (UNESCO PROAP: 1993). UNESCO emphasized that "logically, however, it is reasonable to infer that increases in knowledge and skills are needed for the introduction and expansion of modern technology and that education must grow and change if a technologically based socio economic system is to grow and change. Education seen in this way is an enabling agent for development" (UNESCO PROAP: 1993).

Basing its argument on the fact that the formal schooling has alienated a large chunk of population due to its urban orientation it suggested the idea of *Continuing education* – "the opportunity to engage in lifelong learning", which emerges as "a way of compensating for the inadequacies of the formal system by giving people a second chance, and also of ensuring a continual growth and upgrading of human resources throughout the lives of all citizens" (UNESCO PROAP: 1993). It has been cited as a source for developing a community and individuals because education leads to equity. "It provides knowledge, skills and values which enable people to add economic value to their labour beyond that necessary for mere subsistence." It ultimately makes possible a "rational, sustainable and humanistic" national development. The development of human resource has become the focus of attention.

The focus on universalizing the elementary education and the intrinsic unequal character of education, evident from dual education system (private and public schools), has led to introduction of variety of educational programs. The gradual substitution of the term 'education' by 'literacy' implied that a basic requirement, which is decided in an ad hoc manner, needs to be met. The choice of 'schemes' range from literacy measured in terms of capacity to read bus numbers, do signatures to sitting in dilapidated schools without sufficient infrastructure and being taught by underpaid and under qualified teachers. The inequality in education essentially reflects the iniquitous social relations and this is evident in the way more educational facilities are enjoyed those who have better purchasing power. The problems acquire a serious dimension when this inequality in education, represented

by its commodification and therefore marginalization of a vast mass, is endorsed by the state in the name of resource crunch or in the name of achieving targets.

Numerous programmes have been launched or suggested by development agencies. Non Formal Education, Adult Education and Multi-grade Teaching are some among many other methods/programmes which have come to signify education. UNESCO PROAP document (1997) blatantly puts conditions in which multi-grade teaching can be implemented – such as shortage of classrooms and teachers, to bring disadvantaged people in the education net etc., thereby proclaiming a different system for the disadvantaged and thereby negating the plank of equality and welfare society.

The spate of liberalization unleashed in aftermath of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), has been accompanied by radical changes in educational scenario, with initiatives taken up by the state itself. The understanding of education as an isolated construct has been advocated quite vigorously. It all began in a very direct manner after the First World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990, sponsored by World Bank, opened the way for "intervention by international funding agencies in national educational structures and processes of the developing countries" (Sadgopal, 2001). This was further enforced by the Dakar Framework for Action, which committed itself to "increasing external finance for education, in particular basic education" among other aims, (UNESCO, 2000). The documents not only analyze knowledge in context of market but also argue for opening up of economy, competition for more efficient system and a private public partnership as the only viable alternative. They perceive education as a commodity in the sphere of market and also seek its popularization as necessary means for 'empowerment' and 'skill development' for sustainable living.

The understanding of education as an arena of critical thinking has been negated and replaced by the necessity of literacy. The ideas of World Bank and other international agencies have percolated down to become India's State policy. A homogenous language and uniform set of perspectives are seen omnipresent in all documents - from World Bank and UN to Indian state's documents. The National Human

Development Report, 2001, therefore, says that "education, in the present day context is perhaps the single most important means for individuals to improve personal endowments, build capacity levels, overcome constraints and, in the process, enlarge their available set of opportunities and choices for a sustained improvement in well being" (GOI, 2002a). The Tenth Plan has clearly stated its intention of inviting private-public partnership (a subtle way of inducing privatization of education) in education ignoring the dynamics of capital and market, which seldom functions on basis of welfare motivations (GOI, 2001a). The programs and policies such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan among others is a blatant example of institutionalizing the educational inequality in India.

The perceptions which regarded education as an emancipatory tool have been lost. Gandhi or Freire's ideas have been mutilated to unrecognizable extent. The task force of Planning Commission expressed its concern at the way "commodification" of education deprives rural and poor children of education but its suggestions tend to fall in the same trap. It suggests "distance education as a means of bringing education to every school-aged child..." which will feed information to the passive recipients in villages killing their creativity and what Tagore called 'freedom of mind' (GOI, 2001b). Quite similar understanding constituted the tone of the Vision 2020 document of Government of India when it remarks that "literacy is an indispensable minimum condition for development, but it is not sufficient. In this increasingly complex and technologically sophisticated world, ten years of school education must also be considered as an essential prerequisite for citizens to adapt and succeed economically, avail of the social opportunities and develop their individual potentials. Education is the primary and most effective means so far evolved for transmitting practically useful knowledge from one generation to another" (GOI, 2002b). Its reduction of education to information and suggestion for ten year of schooling in a 'competitive world' sufficient for development seems away from the social realities which are in fact negated by the facts put forth by Planning Commission Tenth Plan document on the socially disadvantaged section. However, its recommendation for doubling the expenditure has a positive aspect if it is combined with the wider issues of pedagogy, infrastructure, and curriculum reform.

The new paradigms have led to conceptualizations developed in haste to achieve the target of literacy. The notion of education has been put on backburner in this process. The Gandhi's rejection of literacy becomes extremely relevant here and so does the Freirian concern for criticality and dialogicity as essence of education. Libertarian terminology of Friere, Illich and others has been co-opted *sans* their conceptual underlining. Paulo Friere's ideas were distorted and co-opted by the development programmes and agencies "for the incorporation of the small peasant into the consumer economy" (Kumar: 1989). Terms like 'knowledge society', 'empowerment', 'disadvantaged' etc., are used without dealing with the meaning that they represent. In fact, meanings of the words have been reformulated in this whole process as can be seen in Birla-Ambani report on Education, which talks of the need for "revolution" in education system.

Some Emerging Issues in Education Debate

There are new additions to the issues of non-enrollment and drop out, which continue to be Herculean tasks. Objective categories of enrolments and measurement of literacy had inbuilt contradictions, which have emerged as issues of quality education. Long-pending aims of universalizing elementary education culminated into target oriented programs. The issue of 'targets' become important and relevant because UNESCO defines it as a sign of commitment of states. It also enables external partners to support the programs of 'education'. The World Bank talks extensively in context of 'aid-worthiness' of countries and 'target requirements' as important to get funding and technical support. Target achievements become necessary criteria for grants or loans (Goldstein, 2004). The learning target also means centralization of control "even within the rhetoric of diversity and local decision-making" (Goldstein, 2004).

Now it has been realized that "enrolment is obviously not a big issue anymore" attendance, transition, completion and learning outcomes are emerging as bigger issues..." (Ramachandran, Jandhyala & Sajhjee, 2003). The issue of education, it is being debated, is more than merely literary campaigns. Scholars have argued that "*equality in educational opportunities and conditions of success*" have been constitutional

rights of every child which have been denied by the Indian state. Now, educational inequality is, instead, being institutionalized through parallel systems of education (Sadgopal 2004a, 2004b, Kumar, Priyam & Saxena, 2002). The pressure generated by 'judiciary' and 'civil society' led the government to enact 86th Amendment making education a fundamental right, though it is being seen as an eyewash (Sadgopal, 2001), while many see it as a step forward towards expanding educational services to the whole country. Whether the new constitutional promulgation will effect any changes in the educational deprivation of the marginalized section is a very significant question that needs to be debated. However, it does not constitute the subject matter of this paper.

More Emphasis on Development: The Concern for Community's Participation!

The condition of the marginalized sections, Dalits and the poor (because their economic condition coincides), has not improved much in more than fifty years of Indian independence. Now, the 'new' developmental agenda of 'decentralization' and 'participation' itself developed through a top-bottom approach is being cited as the panacea of all underdevelopment symptoms. The discourse on development witnessed a major shift since the 1980s in India, when the *processes* of economic liberalization began. This discourse was complemented by new direction provided by scholars like Amartya Sen, who argued in favor of measuring development on basis of human development indicators (Dreze and Sen, 1995). As part of this new direction the issues of hunger, poverty, lack of "basic education", basic health facilities, marginalization on basis of caste and gender etc., acquired greater significance. International pressure, as well as movements from within, created conditions that have been compelling the state to frame newer constitutional provisions taking such issues into account. Many ideals laid down in the Directive Principles of State Policy have been translated into Constitutional Amendments and Acts. One such example is Article 40 of Indian Constitution, which was translated into the 73rd Amendment in 1992. Similarly, Article 45 of the Constitution, which relates to the free and compulsory education to all till the age of fourteen years, became the 86th Amendment (the Fundamental Right to Education).

These new developments have taken place in the context of an increasing emphasis on decentralization of governance throughout the world, under pressure from the variety of 'new social movements' as well as international donor agencies. India, of course, is not alone in this process. Decentralization has emerged as a dominant trend in world politics. In 1998, the World Bank, for example, estimated that all but 12 of the 75 developing and transitional countries with populations greater than 5 million had embarked on a process of political devolution (Johnson, 2003). The emphasis on decentralization and its purpose is evident in the documents of World Bank when it claims that "successful decentralization improves the efficiency and responsiveness of the public sector while accommodating potentially explosive political forces" (World Bank, 2000a). It is seen as an instrument to tackle the pressures of localization and bring the oppositional forces into a formal framework through institutionalizing their actions and ideas.

Decentralization aims at enhancing participation of the marginalized sections of population, with three major objectives of (1) ensuring that the aspirations and preferences of the marginalized get reflected in state interventions; (2) using community for participant monitoring to improve service delivery, transparency and accountability; and (3) providing the marginalized more control over their lives. Decentralization may mean *devolution* of power to local decision makers, *deconcentration* of power through posting central government employees at local level or *delegation* of powers to the local level (World Bank, 2000b).

Decentralization to smaller units increases the scope for interaction with the citizenry served. It makes state institutions more responsive to poor people, but only if it allows poor people to hold public servants accountable and ensures their participation in the development process (World Bank, 2000b). The issues of participatory budgeting, dissemination of information, greater transparency and accountability featured prominently in the World Bank doctrines. It also started citing market as a major force which through its competitive mechanism creates instruments of accountability (World Bank, 2003). These ideas percolated down to the Indian state and the National Human Development Report (2001) which says that

“governance for human development relates to the management of all such processes that, in any society, define the environment which permits and enables individuals to raise their capacity levels, on the one hand, and provide opportunities to realize their potential and enlarge the available choices, on the other.” It emphasizes the need to “conceptually re-position” the role of the State (GOI, 2002a). The Vision 2020 document of the Indian government also sees decentralization as an important aspect of development in future through devolution of political and financial power to local bodies as well as enhanced participation of the local masses in the distribution of resources and building and managing local projects (GOI, 2002b).

Hence, on April 24, 1993, the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 came into force (Ministry of Rural Development website). “Since this time, the process of decentralization has been highly variable, ranging from ambitious attempts at *Gram Swaraj* (or village self-rule) in Madhya Pradesh to political *re-centralization* in Karnataka” (Johnson, 2003). This thrust on decentralization bases itself on a wider critique of centralized state planning, on grounds of inefficiency, corruption, and persistent marginalization, in terms of resource generation and distribution, over years of state-controlled development (Johnson, 2003; Bardhan). Even the State began accepting the drawbacks of centralization and bureaucracy and lack of transparency (GOI, 2001c).

It is being argued that decentralization would improve the condition of masses as their participation increases in the issues concerning them directly. The constitutional amendments have been lauded by different quarters in this regard for enhancing the participation of marginalized sections in local decision making processes and also for its impact on administrative transparency and problems such as corruption (Raina, 2000). India has been recognized as doing exceptionally well in terms of democratic institutions and “the *main* limitations of Indian democracy do not... relate so much to democratic institutions as to democratic practice. The performance of democratic institutions is contingent on a wide range of social conditions, from educational levels and political traditions to the nature of social inequalities and popular organizations” (Dieze and Sen, 2002). The recent changes through constitutional amendments are being taken as its continuation.

However, decentralization need not necessarily mean participation. Fears have been expressed (based on empirical evidences by different World Bank Reports as well as by Dreze and Sen [2002]) that when the aspect of participation is ignored and only decentralization is emphasized the democratic institutions become a tool for the local elite. It can merely imply shifting of power from national to local elite (Mathew and Nayak, 1996). If governance means emergence of various actors that participate in governing process apart from the State then it also needs to be ensured that people at the margins of society get space in the changing political landscape. Unless this happens it will be an *apparently* reformed landscape of power equations where new and dominant social elite enjoy the privilege. The traditionally marginalized castes and women remain mute witnesses to the whole process. However, it is also being accepted that the change is gradually taking place. "Over time, the forces of repression seem to be losing some ground, with good prospects of further advance in the direction of both greater social equity and more vibrant local democracy in the near future" (Dreze and Sen, 2002). The aim at this juncture, however, remains to ensure how the sections located at the margins of society get an opportunity to participate in the development process. This becomes more pertinent because of the dialectical relationship between participation of human beings in democratic processes and the indicators of human development such as education. Both enhance the scope of one another towards attaining a higher end.

The India's education policy, the turn which it has taken with the opening of innumerable parallel educational streams for the underprivileged, harps on the tune of decentralization and participation. After the 86th Amendment, decentralized education is being highlighted as the hallmark of the new policies in education. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan focuses on "community ownership", participatory "community based planning process" at grassroots level, "community based monitoring with full transparency" etc. (GOI, undated Sarva Shiksha Document). The local participation and decentralized aspect in education is aimed at involving people in the education process and also mitigate the fallacies that hampered the attainment of educating every citizen of India as laid down in the Article 45 of Indian Constitution. This new framework emerges out of the 86th Amendment and the

pending *Free and Compulsory Education Bill, 2004*. But the question that still remains is whether it will be able to incorporate the most marginalized sections in its scope of empowerment or not. It has been argued, based on the experience of decades that it is difficult to empower people through strengthening their capacities through their 'full participation'. This is because of the structural constraints that do not allow "fuller realization of human potentiality in the case of the deprived sections." These constraints operate at the level of "socio-economic structure, ideology and political process, which the omnibus concept of 'empowerment' does not capture" (Mohanty, 2001). Such critical perspectives indicate the complexities of the social system and the critical need to study the reasons why a section of population is constantly marginalized in the local dynamics of political and social processes.

The marginalization of a vast population on basis of their economic deprivation as well as social discrimination has to be the basis on which any doctrine of empowerment and participation needs to base itself. It is from this marginalization that their cultural exclusion or reasons for non-participation can be culled out. However, this is not to deny that there is a dialectical relationship between the cultural exclusion, socio-economic status and participation in the locally specific affairs. Basis for exclusion is constructed in a local context, which emerges out of the complex interplay of the local contest of power. There is a cultural paradigm, dominant and overwhelming in character, which infuses certain images and motivates certain discourses to establish and sustain the hegemony of certain sections and marginalize others. In our context of Mushar community the same holds true as of any other community. It becomes relevant in this context to recall what Bourdieu writes about the ways and means through which culture is reproduced through education system, which he gives a wider space through notion of 'pedagogic action':

"...Reproduction sought to propose a model of the social mediations and processes which tend, behind the backs of the agents engaged in the school system -- teachers, students and their parents -- and often *against their will*, to ensure the transmission of cultural capital across generations and to stamp pre-existing differences in inherited cultural capital with a meritocratic seal of academic consecration by virtue of the special symbolic potency of the *title* (credential). Functioning in the manner of a huge classificatory machine which

inscribes changes within the purview of the structure, the school helps to make and to impose the legitimate exclusions and inclusions which form the basis of the social order" (Bourdieu: 1990: ix-x).

At this juncture one needs to question whether the exclusionist provisions of education being instituted by the state *fail* (meaning unconsciously) to take into consideration the basis of people's education or seeks to *sustain* and *reproduce* (i.e. consciously, because of inherent character of State, which represents the dominant elite of society and therefore the structural inequality) the existing deprivation. If the Indian state despite having accepted the deprivation of the masses ventures into such discriminatory policy measures, then it becomes obvious about the interests which it represents. From the geographical exclusion of Dalits to their economic impoverishment there are numerous factors, which play a determining role in their educational deprivation.

The SC dwellings, geographically and therefore conceptually declared outcaste, "continue to be deprived and denied of basic amenities and services." Even the urban slums are in no better condition "as they also lack access to basic minimum services of connecting roads, supply of drinking water, primary health care, sanitation, housing etc." Hence, they are denied the basic rights of a human being, which has "a negative impact on their capabilities, capacity, confidence and efforts to join the mainstream."

Therefore, if on the one hand dalits are confronted with immediate consequences of social discrimination then on the other hand their economic condition has also not been showing signs of improvement. "...there has been a decrease in the number of SC cultivators from 28.17 per cent in 1981 to 25.44 per cent in 1991 and an increase in the percentage of agricultural laborers from 48.22 per cent in 1981 to 49.06 per cent in 1991. It is also likely that some of the SCs who have lost their lands may have also joined the ranks of laborers. Evidently, their hold on agrarian economy has also been declining as the number of cultivators has declined from 38 per cent in 1961 to 25.44 per cent in 1991." Their participation in the other sectors of economy, which is being highlighted as the symbols of growth, is also negligible "as SCs can neither compete nor sustain in the liberalized market economy, wherein the national/multi-national

companies with their cost effective products are causing a serious threat to the tradition-based economy of SCs." They are, consequently, "being further marginalised in the new economic regime" (GOI, 2001d).

Question is not of state *failing* to formulate policies on basis of facts that even it has generated through its own agencies. It is rather a *conscious* institutionalization of inequality. Despite its slogans of participation and decentralization it still follows as all other agencies a top down vertical approach in the ultimate analysis, wherein the definition of development itself, conceived as liberalization and globalization, is not debated within the community but taken to them as pre-given, *a priori*, conditions. Education policies have been formulated in the same spirit and the initial implementation, as pointed out by studies, proves this. *Hence, what is at stake is the character of the policy as well as the manner in which it has been formulated and it is implemented.*

The Fundamental Right to Education "has come at a time when the poorest sections of society face exclusion from the production process itself. Increasing unemployment, casualisation and large scale retrenchment of labour and suicide by indebted farmers - at times by consuming the same poison that is supposed to save their crops and bring prosperity - form the context in which this constitutional amendment has been made." The provisions of the Bill and Amendment will also have wider and significant ramifications. "Despite the noticeable silence in the Amendment with regard to a commitment to quality, the freezing of the contested terrain of education as a legal entity is likely to reinforce a particular turn towards teaching as an evidence-based activity. Teaching functionaries in government schools, wary of the legal action that they may become liable to, may shun efforts towards creative pedagogy. In debates on education, empirical testing for outcomes is likely to triumph over the more qualitative process-based approaches" (Kumar, Priyam & Saxena, 2002)

The most blatant example of the failure to follow what the State itself lays down as its own policy has been the initial implementation of its much touted SSA. The SSA envisages development of district specific elementary education plans unlike the

DPEP and aims at working in tandem with the PRIs. In the districts where it will be implemented it would be the first attempt to develop educational plans through participation of local people. Human Resource Development Ministry categorized West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as among the worst performers in the SSA. These states failed to spend the amount allotted to them as part of SSA. "Andhra Pradesh has not spent half of its Rs 490 crore outlay while Haryana has also done badly, spending only about one third of its total outlay. Kerala too spent very little of the initial Central allocation whereas Orissa has spent only Rs 100 crore of its allocated Rs 250 crore, and Maharashtra could use just Rs 200 crore of its Rs 500 crore outlay" (Majumdar, 2003)

In most of the cases the pre project activities envisaged as a part of SSA were not undertaken. To initiate such activities, a ceiling of Rs.5 million (upper ceiling) per district has been kept "but in reality districts were sanctioned much lower amount than the upper ceiling" (Mehta from website). Research studies like, Social Assessment and Baseline Assessment Studies are other forms of pre-project activities, which have not been undertaken except in Uttar Pradesh & Tamil Nadu. Even the *apparent* central idea of community ownership has been doubted by experts because of the way committees are being formed. The district plans are formulated hastily and without active participation of the local community (see Mehta). The problem has two interlinked dimensions: one the one hand, the state is not very committed to *educating* people, in terms of a critical full-time education process, which is also libratory, and on the other hand, the notions of empowerment and participation does not get realized because the urge in people to become a part of the process is not generated due to the strict bureaucratic and hierarchical framework of the process. Knowledge which is inherently related to power structures in society is in a constant battle with the striving bodies of local and marginalized knowledge pushed to the periphery. It is largely due to these processes that apprehension is expressed about SSA becoming a movement. Mobilizations are generally based on conscientization, which cannot be achieved through a tailored programme, run by paid staff with pre defined goals and formula.

Dalits: Caught in the Whirlpool of Caste and Class

The Indian educational scenario has been characterized by extreme inequality and it has been established beyond doubt by the quantitative data generated by the state as well as many other independent researches. The NCERT Sixth Educational Survey made it amply clear that there were 135208 Dalit habitations, which did not have a primary school within one kilometer (NCERT, 1997). Their over all education in terms of literacy also presents a dismal picture. The NFJS - II (1998-99) as well NSSO data clearly reflects the situation of dalit's education in rural Bihar.

One can derive an interesting aspect of dalits socio-economic status and link it with their educational status. The social and economic deprivation of the Dalits goes hand in hand. It is because of this reason that the references to poverty become important, especially if one talks of the rural areas of the Indian society. The Scheduled castes have the lowest Monthly Per Capita Consumption Expenditure (MPCE) in Bihar as shown by the NSSO survey (Table No.1).

Table 1: Distribution of persons by MPCE class and average MPCE separately for different social groups in Rural Bihar

MPCE class (Rs)	Social group				
	ST	SC	OBCs	Others	All
0-225	14.0	14.4	6.1	3.9	7.9
225-255	13.4	11.9	8.0	4.2	8.4
255-300	17.4	19.7	16.6	8.3	15.6
300-340	18.0	16.7	14.8	12.2	14.9
340-380	12.5	12.0	14.4	11.5	13.2
380-420	6.3	7.7	10.2	12.8	10.0
420-470	6.2	7.4	9.7	13.7	9.8
470-525	4.1	4.4	7.4	8.4	6.7
525-615	3.5	3.8	5.9	11.2	6.4
615-775	3.6	1.7	4.4	7.3	4.4
775-950	0.4	0.2	1.5	3.5	1.6
950-more	0.5	0.1	0.8	3.0	1.1
all classes	99.9	100	99.8	100	100
average MPCE (Rs)	337.16	329.32	384.66	457.59	384.45

Source: Difference in level of consumption among socio economic groups 1999 2000, NSS 55th Round (Table 2R, Page No: A-36) (Report No.472 (55/1.0/10)

The dalits also fair poorly in land ownership. Most of them are landless or barely manage to own a small patch of land (Table No 2) and therefore their survival largely depends on the daily wage activities.

Table No.2 Distribution of households by size class of land possessed in rural Bihar (Hectare)

Social Groups	0.0	0.01-0.49	0.41-1.00	1.01-2.00	2.01-4.00	4.01 & above
ST	2.0	35.5	3.2	23.5	5.5	0.5
SC	23.8	67.1	6.4	2.1	0.6	0
OBC	8.8	58	19.5	9.5	3.5	0.7
Other	6.0	49.2	2.3	12.6	6.1	3.1

Source: Table 5.1R, NSSO 53rd Round (July 1999 – June 2000), Employment & Unemployment Situation among Social Groups in India (Report No.469 (55/10/7))

If a correlation between their economic status and educational status is to be derived using the MPCE and landownership pattern as the indicators of their economic condition we find that dalits are deprived of education at all levels. The SCs fall largely in the low MPCE category as well as possess little or no land. The categories of low MPCE as well as that of lower land possessed are the ones which have more illiterates and even if they are literate the educational level is largely below primary level. The inequality becomes starker once we look at the higher education. (Table No. 3 & 4)

Table No.3 - Distribution of persons aged 7 & above by level of education separately by sex and MPCE class in Rural Bihar (%)

Ma.e	Not literate	Literate	Literate below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate & above
MPCE class (Rs.)								
0-225	61.3	38.7	20.4	6.5	8.2	2.2	0.8	0.5
225-255	59.7	40.3	20.5	7.7	6.7	3.9	0.8	0.7
255-300	54.7	45.3	21.4	8.4	9.0	4.8	0.9	0.8
300-340	48.7	51.3	21.5	9.7	11.2	5.9	1.6	1.6
340-380	45.9	54.1	21.1	10.6	11.5	7.0	2.1	1.9
380-420	42.2	57.8	21.1	10.2	13.3	8.8	3.3	1.2
420-470	34.1	65.9	23.2	11.9	14.3	9.7	4.0	2.8
470-525	36.3	63.7	20.2	10.1	15.2	10.7	3.9	3.6
525-615	29.9	70.1	17.0	9.6	18.9	12.5	6.4	5.6
615-775	29.3	70.7	17.2	10.1	16.4	13.3	7.0	6.7
775-950	19.4	80.6	16.4	7.5	16.4	24.4	9.2	6.7
950+	15.8	84.2	13.9	8.0	17.8	12.4	10.2	21.9
All	44.6	55.4	20.6	9.5	12.2	7.8	2.9	2.5
Female								
0-225	86.6	13.4	8.9	2.2	1.6	0.5	0.2	0.0
225-255	83.5	16.5	12.9	2.2	1.1	0.3	0.0	0.0
255-300	82.2	17.8	10.6	3.7	2.1	0.9	0.3	0.2
300-340	75.2	24.8	13.8	5.1	4.0	1.6	0.1	0.1
340-380	77.9	22.1	12.1	4.3	3.5	1.1	0.7	0.3
380-420	70.3	29.7	14.6	6.9	5.2	2.9	0.1	0.1
420-470	66.7	33.3	15.5	7.5	6.5	3.5	0.3	0.2
470-525	66.2	33.8	14.7	6.2	7.3	4.1	0.9	0.6
525-615	56.6	43.4	18.3	9.2	8.3	5.5	1.0	1.0
615-775	55.9	44.1	18.9	8.9	8.5	4.0	3.0	0.8
775-950	42.7	57.3	22.7	8.6	12.5	9.2	2.2	2.1
950+	33.6	66.4	12.8	7.2	16.2	11.8	8.3	10.2
All	72.9	27.1	13.7	5.4	4.6	2.4	0.6	0.4
Person								
0-225	73.9	26.1	14.7	4.4	4.9	1.4	0.5	0.3
225-255	71.5	28.5	16.7	4.9	3.9	2.1	0.4	0.4
255-300	68.2	31.8	16.1	6.1	5.7	2.9	0.6	0.5
300-340	61.5	38.5	17.8	7.5	7.7	3.8	0.9	0.9
340-380	60.7	39.3	16.9	7.7	7.8	4.3	1.5	1.1
380-420	55.6	44.4	18.0	8.6	9.4	6.0	1.8	0.6
420-470	49.8	50.2	19.5	9.8	10.5	6.7	2.2	1.6
470-525	50.5	49.5	17.6	8.2	11.4	7.6	2.5	2.1
525-615	42.5	57.5	17.6	9.4	13.9	9.2	3.9	3.5
615-775	42.3	57.7	18.0	9.5	12.5	8.8	5.1	3.8
775-950	29.8	70.2	19.2	8.0	14.7	17.6	6.0	4.7
950+	23.7	76.3	13.4	7.6	17.1	12.1	9.4	16.7
All	58.2	41.8	17.3	7.5	8.5	5.2	1.8	1.5

Table No.4: Distribution of Persons aged 7 & above by level of education, separately by sex and land possessed in Rural Bihar (%)

Size class of land possessed (ha)	Not Literate	Literate	Literate below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate & Above
Male								
< 0.01	667	33.3	15.9	5.3	7.0	3.2	0.7	1.1
0.01-0.40	50.9	49.1	21.1	9.2	9.5	5.6	2.0	1.7
0.41-1.00	34.2	65.8	21.4	11.5	17.2	9.8	3.4	2.6
1.01-2.00	28.9	71.1	20.8	11.5	17.5	12.4	4.7	4.2
2.01-4.00	23.1	76.9	20.7	9.4	17.5	16.0	7.4	5.9
4.01 +	21.6	78.4	18.7	7.7	14.4	18.0	9.1	10.4
all classes	44.6	55.4	20.6	9.5	12.2	7.8	2.9	2.5
Female								
< 0.01	87.8	12.2	6.3	2.3	2.3	1.0	0.2	0.1
0.01-0.40	79.0	21.0	12.3	3.5	3.1	1.4	0.3	0.3
0.41-1.00	65.3	34.7	16.4	8.1	6.4	2.7	0.8	0.4
1.01-2.00	61.9	38.1	18.5	8.0	6.2	4.2	0.5	0.6
2.01-4.00	46.5	53.5	18.2	12.3	10.7	7.8	3.0	1.4
4.01 +	42.9	57.1	20.1	10.7	14.2	7.2	3.6	1.4
all classes	72.9	27.1	13.7	5.4	4.6	2.4	0.6	0.4
Person								
< 0.01	76.8	23.2	11.3	3.9	4.7	2.2	0.5	0.6
0.01-0.40	64.5	35.5	16.8	6.5	6.4	3.6	1.2	1.0
0.41-1.00	49.0	51.0	19.0	9.9	12.1	6.4	2.1	1.5
1.01-2.00	44.7	55.3	19.7	9.8	12.1	8.5	2.7	2.5
2.01-4.00	34.4	65.6	19.5	10.8	14.2	12.0	5.3	3.7
4.01 +	32.1	67.9	19.4	9.2	14.3	12.7	6.4	6.0
all classes	58.2	41.8	17.3	7.5	8.5	5.2	1.0	1.5

Source: Table 4R, NSSO 55th Round (July 1999 – June 2000) Literacy and Levels of Education in India 1999-2000, p.A 136 (Report No. 473 (55/1.0/11)

Leave aside the issue of a holistic education even literacy rate among SCs has been dismal in Bihar. As per the 1991 census the literacy rate among men was 30.64%, among women 7.07% and overall literacy among SCs was 19.49%. The situation of inequity in education has been blatant. The reasons, as we see above have been the poor economic condition of dalits supplemented by social discrimination. The local schooling system has been consistently reproducing this inequality and as a result we find the over all educational status of dalits in shambles (Table No.5).

Table No.5: Distribution of persons aged 7 & above by level of education, separately by sex and social group in Rural Bihar (%)

Social Group	Not literate	Literate	1 literate below primary	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Graduate & above
Male								
ST	54.0	46.0	15.3	10.5	12.9	4.1	1.7	1.6
SC	62.9	37.1	19.0	6.0	6.1	4.1	1.0	0.8
OBC	42.0	58.0	22.3	10.6	12.9	7.6	2.5	2.0
Others	28.8	71.2	19.9	9.9	16.3	13.3	6.2	5.7
Not recorded	46.8	53.2	13.5	14.7	6.2	10.1	0.0	8.8
All	44.6	55.4	20.6	9.5	12.2	7.8	2.9	2.5
Female								
ST	78.0	22.0	9.4	5.5	4.4	1.9	0.4	0.3
SC	88.7	13.3	7.8	2.2	2.1	0.9	0.2	0.1
OBC	74.7	25.3	13.6	5.1	4.2	1.9	0.3	0.2
Others	53.2	46.8	21.2	9.2	8.1	5.2	1.8	1.2
Not recorded	76.3	23.7	10.6	0.0	13.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
All	72.9	27.1	13.7	5.4	4.6	2.4	0.6	0.4
Person								
ST	65.6	34.4	12.4	8.1	8.8	3.0	1.1	1.0
SC	74.3	25.7	13.7	4.2	4.2	2.6	0.6	0.4
OBC	57.6	42.4	18.1	8.0	8.8	4.9	1.5	1.2
Others	40.8	59.2	20.5	9.6	12.2	9.3	4.0	3.5
Not recorded	61.6	38.4	12.1	7.4	9.6	5.0	0.0	4.4
All	58.2	41.8	17.3	7.5	8.5	5.2	1.8	1.5

Source: Table 3R, NSS 55th Round (July 1999-June 2000), Literacy and levels of Education in India 1999-2000 (Report No. 473 (55/1.0/11) Page No: A-102

There are innumerable studies which point to discrimination that the dalits have to face in schools, which is complemented by the situation outside the school. If one applies the notion of "pedagogic action" of Bourdieu, which would include "education in the broadest sense, encompassing more than the process of formal education" (Bottomore, 1990), then one needs to take into consideration the socio-economic and cultural environment that impedes dalits from attending school. It has observed that "school participation on the part of children from disadvantaged castes is a major challenge to the conservative upper-caste notion that knowledge is not important or appropriate for members of the lower orders" (Dreze: 2003:04). The underprivileged students also drop out more than the other students before Class V. "this phenomenon is far more pronounced among the children from the most disadvantaged sections of our society, most of whom rely on the government primary school system" (Ramachandran, 2003: 4).

There is a cultural setting, a social construct that dominates the life of the villagers. This construct categorizes dalits as lacking merit, and not having 'respect' or

'dignity'. As a consequence, the children from disadvantaged section are never asked the typical question of 'What do you want to become' (Rampal, 2000). Similarly, on many occasions in the course of current fieldwork as well as previous fieldworks if a question such as 'Who are the respected people of your village' ('*Tum apne gaon ke kuch sammanit vyaktiyon ke naam geenwa sakte ho?*') was asked to the children they could hardly name a few persons from dalit community. There is an omnipresent cultural framework constructed by the dominant power of the village enforced by different mediums in everyday life. It is through these mediums, inside as well as outside the school, that the hegemonic culture and ethos is reproduced.

It is this construct that institutionalizes discrimination in society through its various instruments. Hence, the unequal structural realities of the village life play a very important role in producing and reproducing educational inequality in the village. This gets reflected in every aspect of schooling from curriculum to the pedagogy (Apple, 1990). And that is why the learning process becomes disinteresting for the child. The subjects taught and the way they are taught are alien to the child, held synonymous with monotony and unfreedom by them. "A venture in education, to be meaningful, must integrate the words, sounds and images of the learner. This is more relevant in the case of the oppressed whose life does not 'naturally' find its expression and portrayal in the vocabulary and thoughts of the privileged in society" (Talib, 1998).

Mushars and their Educational Marginalization

The situation becomes more acute when one narrows down to certain communities within the larger category of Scheduled Castes. One such community is that of Mushars in Bihar. Their educational status represents a negation of the recent stress on decentralization in service delivery, whose reflection is evident on all policy documents concerning education now. The analysis of data shows that their literacy has not even crossed 5% mark (see Table No. 6). The literacy percentage of other scheduled castes is also low but the kind of growth that they have shown over decades is not very much visible among the Mushars (see Table in Appendix).

Table No.6: Literacy Rate (%) for Different Categories at National and Bihar Level

Categories	Total	Male	Female
National (Total)*	52.21	64.13	39.29
Bihar (Total)*	38.48	52.49	22.89
National (SCs)*	37.41	49.91	23.76
Bihar (SCs)*	19.49	30.64	7.07
Mushars (Bihar)**	4.63	7.67	1.25

* Source: Selected Educational Statistics 1999-2000, Government of India, MHRD, New Delhi, 2001 (Data is based on 1991 Census)

** Source: Calculated on basis of Census 1991, Special Tables on Scheduled Castes, Part VIII (I), Volume-I. This data is for population of 7 years and above.

Off late many intervention programs have been initiated by donor agencies and consequent researches have also been done. Such researches have thrown light on the certain vital ethnographic dimensions of Mushars life and have in fact, at certain juncture also argued that "if Mushars have to be pulled out from the clutches of this plight, the only means to accomplish this task is education" (Sundarani:2002:71). The arguments have fallen in the trap of giving education an unsurpassed autonomy in terms of being an agency of transformation. Education is definitely a major source of development of self as well as a collective, but there are a variety of factors that impinge on the underdevelopment of the self as well as the community. Mushars' underdevelopment and educational deprivation in specific can be understood fully only if we consider their location within the local social structural framework. Education, being the focus here, must be looked at the way the social relations in their totality interact and impact this community. Hence, the local culture and social and economic conditions of the Mushars become vital in understanding their educational deprivation.

REFLECTION ON EDUCATION INEQUALITY – EVIDENCES FROM THE FIELD

Based on this given situation an effort was made to randomly select a village with Mushar population to find out the dynamics of such educational deprivation. One month field work was undertaken to collect basic information about the community and generate qualitative data through group discussions and intensive interaction with the village community. However, in course of fieldwork it was decided to look at two adjoining villages in Jehanabad district – Kasain & Godiha. Situated on the road connecting Jehanabad with Arwal district these villages are about six kilometers

from the district headquarters. In the two villages questionnaire to collect basic information was administered. An effort was made to engage in dialogue more with members of Mushar community.

Table No. 7 Distribution of sample among different Castes (%)

Castes	Kasain	Godiha	Total
Mushar	49.1	20.5	37.6
Dusadh	18.2	10.3	15.1
Brahmin	1.8	0.0	1.1
Bhumihar	9.1	0.0	5.4
Mahto	12.7	0.0	7.5
Yadav	7.3	0.0	4.3
Kahar	1.8	0.0	1.1
Chamar	0.0	64.1	25.8
Pasi	0.0	5.1	2.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

The total questionnaires administered in Kasain village were 55, whereas in Godiha village the number was 39. Out of this two communities had substantial representation - 27 Mushar households in Kasain and 8 in Godiha, 10 and 4 households of Dusadhs in Kasain and Godiha respectively and 25 Chamar households in Godiha. An effort was also made to look at the comparative situation of the different dalit communities. Apart from the questionnaires, which also helped in providing inroads in the village community as well as in establishing a rapport with the local villagers, group discussions and informal interviews were the other major source of information and local perspective that we derived.

The two villages represented a mixture of different castes such as Mushar, Dusadh, Brahmin, Bhumihar, Mahto, Yadav, Kahar, Chamar and Pasi. The presence of upper caste, mainly Bhumihars, can be felt in Kasain despite their smaller number. Though they are small in number, the *Mukhiya* of the Larsa panchayat, within which these two village fall, is a Bhumihar and the *up-Mukhiya* is a Mahto (OBC) by caste. The two ward members from Kasain are also Mahto. The dominance is of the OBCs and savarna castes as is starkly clear in their numerically high presence in the bodies such as panchayat samitis, local puja samitis etc. The symbols of power are vested with the non-dalit castes, except for the relatively higher representation of Chamar caste in Village Education Committee of Godiha village (five of total of fourteen members, with the president being a Chamar). When one says symbols of power it has been

looked into here in the way decision-making is carried out during Dussehra puja, panchayat meetings or village education committee meetings especially in the Kasain village. It is also seen in terms of notions about certain communities, which are constructed and popularized leading to maintenance of status quo.

Mushars in the Local Context

As the study was primarily focused on the Mushar community, trying to look at their educational marginalization, it becomes important to dwell upon the status of this community. 'Mushars' belong to the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy and have been considered 'untouchable' by the traditional notions of caste belief. They are distributed in different parts of Bihar like Bhagalpur, Munger, Purnea, Gaya, Jehanabad, Arwal, Patna, Darbhanga and other districts. Risley considered them as 'offshoot of the Bhuiya tribe of Chota Nagpur'. Some interpret their names as *Masu + hera* = flesh seeker/hunter while some others consider them as *Musa + har* = rat-eaters. They are divided into clans (*gotras*) such as Balakumuni/Balakmum, Daitinia, Sohlaut, Pail, Rikh-mun, Rishimuni, Tisbaria, Bansghat, Danharia, Sarpurkha, Kasmeta etc. Majhi, Mandar and Mushar are their surnames. They do not have inhibitions in accepting water or food from Hindu communities except Chamars (Singh, 1993).

They are predominantly agricultural laborers, with the ability to measure and assess the quality of soil. But gradually there has been a sharp decline in employment opportunities for them. Their traditional job market has been squeezed. Consequently, they get work for only three to four months a year "and that too primarily for women folk". This scarcity creates financial crisis for which they approach moneylenders and get trapped in the vicious cycle of money lending. It has been argued that their economic plight affects their educational status as well (Sharma, 1999).

As a very specific and common feature of the geographical location of different caste groups in a village the Dalits have generally been placed on the fringes of village and the farthest location, as per the rules of purity-pollution, is allocated to the Mushars,

Doms etc. Their participation in the village affairs is negligible and are treated as non-identities in the local socio political processes of governance and administration.

The only contact that the villages generally have with them is in context of the purchase of their labor power. Because of their historical alienation they have failed to be part of the various schemes, with certain exceptions, and development planning. Most of the Mushars are landless (Table No. 18 & 19) and work as agricultural labour, with even their children working at a very early age of 12-14 years. Around 8-10% of children of this community have started going to school. Marriage takes at a very early age, when the boy is of 12-14 years and by the age of 20 years the married couple set up a separate household. The hardships of life, of earning a livelihood forces them to remain outside the house allowing little time for them to interact with the children (Lokshala & CDI, 2003).

In fact, the actual test of any decentralized planning rests, anywhere, in its capability to incorporate such groups into the system. Even if the claims to "impartial" disbursement of developments are made by the state, their economic and social condition stands in sharp contrast to it. If educational status of the country, and Dalits and women in specific, has become a subject of major concern it becomes imperative to explore the reasons behind near-static literacy rate of this community.

The Educational Status of Villages

The composition of the two villages shows that the maximum illiteracy is among the Mushars in the age group of 5-14. The number is higher also because of the higher number of Mushar respondents. However, noticeable in this table is absence of illiterates among the Mahto, Bhumihars, Brahmin and Kahar. On the other hand, the number of Mushars in the category of Primary to 12th decreases because they are not able to continue schooling even if they get enrolled in schools.

Table No. 8 Educational Status of Kasain

Caste	Illiterate (5-14)	Illiterate(15+)	Literate < primary	Primary	Middle	10 th	12 th	Graduate & Above
Mushai	20	59	46	7	3	2	1	0
Dusadh	3	19	16	4	1	1	0	0
Brahmin	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1
Bhuminar	0	2	8	5	2	8	5	5
Mahto	0	6	17	4	11	6	3	0
Yadav	3	6	6	4	2	4	3	0
Kahar	0	1	2	1	0	2	1	0
Total	26	93	93	25	20	24	14	6

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

In the case of Godiha village, where all the respondents belonged to Dalit community, one finds the over all number decreases as one moves from *literate < primary schooling* category. In this the number of Mushars, as in the case of Kasain, shows a decline.

Table No. 9 Educational Status of Godiha

Caste	Illiterate (5-14)	Illiterate(15+)	Literate < primary	Primary	Middle	10th	12th	Graduate & Above
Mushar	5	15	2	1	1	1	0	0
Chamar	15	69	56	13	12	3	0	0
Dusadh	0	3	9	1	4	1	0	0
Pasi	1	3	4	1	2	0	1	0
Total	21	90	70	16	19	5	1	0

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

The illiteracy or lower educational level among Dalits and Mushars in general does not reflect absence of desire to study among them. There are many more reasons than mere non-interest of parents as many argue. There are notions such as *Mushars are disinterested or not interested in upward mobility* made popular in the local society. However, one needs to go into the dynamics of why such notions emerge only about certain particular communities and made popular only by certain communities.

Kasain village has a middle school, which has five rooms. One room serves as the office and four rooms are used for teaching purpose. There are a total of five teachers, including a woman teacher and one *shiksha mitra*. There are two toilets and three hand pumps (out of which one is not functional). There is no game teacher. In the school compound one could see animals tied to the posts by villagers.

The students get enrolled here for classes I to VIII. Total enrollment was 321 and there were only five teachers. One teacher had to give two classes simultaneously. Leave aside the dismal teacher student ratio here (64.2:1), the basic infrastructure of rooms are also lacking.

Table No.10 Enrollment for Year 2004 in Kasain Middle

Class	SCs	Others	Total
I	23	59	82
II	17	42	59
III	7	32	39
IV	10	25	35
V	5	40	45
VI	5	20	25
VII	5	31	36
Total	72	249	321

Source: Based on figures provided by the local school

The Table No. 10 above shows that there are less dalit students enrolled in the school than the others. This number reduces as one moves up and reaches the lowest figure of five students in Class V-VIII. This shows how dalits drop out before reaching Class V even if enrolled at earlier stages.

There is one primary school in Godiha village with two rooms. There is one hand pump and two toilets, which has been constructed in 2004 but has not started functioning because some portions have collapsed due to use of bad material. There are no sports item for children in the school. There are two teachers, out of which one is *shiksha mitra*. What is interesting in the Table No.11 given below is that the over all situation of education is disappointing. There are only seven children in Class V. The condition of Mushars has been worst because in 2002 there was only one Mushar child enrolled, who never attended the school whereas in the years 2003 and 2004 out of two Mushar children enrolled only attended school.

Table No. 11 Enrollment for Year 2004 in Godiha Primary School

Class	SCs			Others			Total		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
I	12	17	29	24	20	44	36	37	73
II	16	9	25	8	13	21	24	22	46
III	4	8	12	6	10	16	10	18	28
IV	9	3	12	7	3	10	16	6	22
V	1	2	3	3	1	4	4	3	7
Total	42	39	81	48	47	95	90	86	176

A close look at the Table No. 12 below reveals a complete picture of total number children in the surveyed households and the number of children enrolled going to the school. It was seen that even though the children were enrolled many of them did not go school. However, one finds that the enrollment is near 53.8% among Mushars compared to 57.1% among Dusadhs, 90.9% among Bhumihars, 95.5% among Mahtos and 76.9% among Yadavs. Hence, even if one goes by the enrollment rates finds that Mushars fair the worst.

Table No. 12 School Going Children in Age Group 0-18 Years (Kasain)

Caste	Total 0-4 years		Total	Total 5-18 years		Total	School going children		Total	Non-school going children		Total	Total Children
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		
Mushar	12	14	26	36	29	65	22	13	35	14	16	30	91
Dusadh	3	2	5	9	5	14	8	0	8	1	5	6	19
Brahmin	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	3
Bhumihar	4	3	7	7	4	11	6	4	10	1	0	1	18
Mahto	5	4	9	12	10	22	11	10	21	1	0	1	31
Yadav	0	6	6	11	2	13	8	2	10	3	0	3	19
Kahar	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	4
Total	26	31	57	75	53	128	55	32	87	20	21	41	185

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

On the other hand, the picture that emerges from Godiha (see Table No. 13) is that the enrollment among Mushars is a mere 9.09% compared to the 61.3% among Chamars, 100% among the Dusadhs and 66.6% among the Pasis.

Table No.13 School Going Children in Age Group 0-18 Years (Godiha)

Caste	0-4 years		Total	5-18 years		Total	School going children		Total	Non-school going children		Total	Total Children
	Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		Boys	Girls		
Mushar	2	3	5	6	5	11	1	0	1	5	5	10	16
Chamar	18	7	25	37	38	75	25	21	46	12	17	29	100
Dusadh	3	2	5	2	4	6	2	4	6	0	0	0	11
Pasi	1	1	2	4	2	6	4	0	4	0	2	2	8
Total	24	13	37	49	49	98	32	25	57	17	24	41	135

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

Desire for Education among Mushars

The study tried to look at (1) whether people perceived education as having 'utility'; (2) what did they expect from education; and (3) whether the universalizing discourse of essentializing 'English' as a necessary language and subject to be studied has made its inroads or not.

It will be erroneous to consider that parents are least interested in sending their children to school. The school and education as a whole has come to be recognized as an essential means to be upwardly mobile. When we tried to quantify the very fundamental perspective about the reasons they think education is necessary, most of them either saw it as a means of better employment opportunities or as a tool that introduces them to new things. One respondent from Mushar community in Kasain village remarked: *"If children go to school they will learn to be neat and clean and live a better life. They will learn new things. We want our children to study. Can any parent not want its child to study? It is only after studying that he will earn a livelihood and live comfortably. It will also bring fame to us."* Another respondent from the same community said: *"My son will study, move ahead with studies and gain knowledge. It will be only through studying that his development will take place and then only he will get a job... Then I will not have to go to other people with my letters."* Most of the respondents believed that education is important to learn new things, which would equip the child better to live in this world, and also for employment. With such opinionated view about education it is difficult to hold parents responsible, especially without taking into consideration the other reasons for the absence of education among them.

Table No.14 Importance of Sending Child to School (Kasain)

Caste	To be good human beings	To learn New Things	For Employment
Mushar	1	23	16
Dusadh	0	9	8
Brahmin	1	0	0
Bhumihar	3	1	2
Mahto	0	3	6
Yadav	2	1	3
Kahar	0	0	1
Total	7	37	36

Table No. 15 Importance of Sending Child to School (Godiha)

Caste	To be good human beings	To learn New Things	For Employment
Mushar	1	6	3
Chamar	0	15	24
Dusadh	0	4	2
Pasi	0	0	1
Total	1	25	30

Note: Many people expressed more than one opinion about the importance of going to school

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

They even responded to questions about the quality of teaching in the village school. Most of them looked at the school as offering good education. However, some were

even skeptical about the way teachers behave with the students of Mushars. Some of them even remarked that they do not pay sufficient attention to children and generally came to school as part of duty. Some informed that in many cases teachers refuse to enroll their children as well. There were other issues that hampered the enrolment of children into school. In fact, in Kasain school the current headmaster introduced school dress, which was accepted by most of the villagers, but some of the respondents said that they could not afford dress for their children and therefore had to withdraw children from school. The headmaster said that wearing school dress was not compulsory and that he had told the poorer sections that if they could not afford one immediately they could get a school dress sewn for their children during festivals instead of buying other kinds of clothes.

The respondents were asked about whether learning English is necessary in todays world. They looked at English as a tool that would enable the person to interact with others in other locations more easily, that would enable him to read signboards, enable him read the name of medicines, and would bring better employment opportunities for the person.

Table No. 16 Quality of Teaching in Kasai

Caste	Quality of Teaching in School		Is English Necessary		Don't Know	
	Good	Bad	Yes	No	Yes	No
Mushar	17	6	17	0	7	7
Dusadh	4	4	8	0	3	2
Brahmin	0	1	1	0	0	0
Bhumihar	1	4	5	0	0	0
Mahto	3	4	7	0	0	0
Yadav	3	1	4	0	0	0
Kahar	0	1	1	0	0	0
Total	28	21	43	0	10	9

Table No. 17 Quality of Teaching in Godiha

Caste	Quality of Teaching in School		Is English Necessary		Don't Know	
	Good	Bad	Yes	No	Yes	No
Mushar	3	1	3	0	4	4
Chamar	22	1	22	0	6	4
Dusadh	2	1	3	0	1	1
Pasi	1	0	1	0	0	0
Total	28	3	29	0	11	9

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

Economic Deprivation of Mushars and their Educational Status

The local economy is primarily agriculture based. Hence, the major source of livelihood is agricultural activities – the landed engaged in extracting maximum possible surplus and the landless left to the wage based income, which is not available to them throughout the year (see Table No. 18 & 19).

Table No. 18 Occupational Pattern (Kasain)

Caste	Landless	persons		
		Landed Not working for others	Sharecroppers	Traditional
Mushar	67	0	3	0
Dusadh	13	0	0	0
Bhumihar	0	8	0	0
Mahto	5	3	8	0
Yadav	0	9	3	0
Kahar	0	2	0	0
Brahmin	0	0	0	1
Total	85	22	14	1

Table No. 19 Occupational Pattern (Godiha)

Caste	Landless	persons	
		Landed Not working for others	Sharecroppers
Muchar	13	0	0
Chamar	66	0	8
Dusadh	1	0	0
Pasi	0	1	1
Total	80	1	9

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

Mushars hardly possess any land apart from the small plot of land on which they live (see Table No. 20 & 21). They are generally landless labourers or engage in other kinds of casual labour to earn their livelihood making their life more precarious.

Table No. 20 Land ownership pattern (Kasain) [Bighas]

Caste	0-1	1.01-2	2.01-5	5.01-10	10+
Mushar	0	0	0	0	0
Dusadh	0	0	0	0	0
Brahmin	0	0	0	0	0
Bhumihar	0	1	1	2	1
Mahto	4	1	2	0	0
Yadav	1	1	1	1	0
Kahar	0	0	1	0	0
Total	5	3	5	3	1

Table No. 21 Land ownership pattern (Godiha) [Bighas]

Caste	0-1	1.01-2	2.01-5	5.01-10	10+
Mushar	0	0	0	0	0
Chamar	7	0	0	0	0
Dusadh	4	0	2	0	0
Pasi	0	0	1	0	0
Total	11	0	1	0	0

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

They do not even migrate to other towns in search of jobs. Migration from Kasain village was relatively negligible compared to Godiha, where the Chamars migrated to work as factory workers outside the state (see Table No. 22 & 23).

Table No. 22 Migration Pattern (Kasain)

Caste	Factory Worker	Driver	Others	Total
Mushar	0	2	0	2
Dusadh	1	1	0	2
Brahmin	0	0	1	1
Bhumihar	0	0	0	0
Mahto	3	0	0	3
Yadav	1	0	0	1
Kahar	0	0	0	0
Total	5	3	1	9

Table No. 23 Migration Pattern (Godiha)

Caste	Factory Worker	Driver	Others	Total
Mushar	0	0	0	0
Chamar	10	2	1	13
Dusadh	1	0	0	1
Pasi	0	0	1	1
Total	11	2	2	15

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

In fact, this could be one of the reasons of their (Chamar's) better educational status in terms of enrollment compared to Mushars. Migration not only means a better affordability to educate children because of relatively better and regular income but also means an exposure to a new world view, which encourages education as a means of upward social mobility.

Economic condition of persons and their educational status have been found to be intimately related as evident from Mushar's unaffordability of education due to economic deprivation. It has been established that education, despite the slogan of 'free' government education, costs a substantial amount and especially when even minimum wages are not implemented. Studies and analysis of data have revealed

that the households have to bear a minimum cost for educating a child even if the primary education is argued to be free. The costs of dress materials, exercise books, bags, pen, pencil etc., are some of the many things that a child needs to be educated. Within the current educational set up the only truth is that the cost of education in government schools is lower than the local body schools or government-aided schools (Tilak, 2001; Tilak, 1996; Nair, 2004).

The expenditure on education becomes a major hurdle for Mushars to send their children to school because they cannot afford any extra expenditure on the education of their children out of their income. This wage, once translated into money is less than the minimum wage announced by the state. 3.5 kilos of rice gets translated into a maximum of Rs.21-22 (if rice sells at Rs.6 per kilo), which is much below the Rs.48.71 per day of official minimum wage (AIPWA, 2003). Above all, they do not get work throughout the year but only during the agricultural season.

Table No. 24 Wages Paid in the Two Villages

Sector of employment	Type of Work	Mode of Payment	Wage Received
Agricultural Labour	Ploughing	Land, Rice, Flour	9 Kathhas of land*, 2.5 kilos of rice/flour or 3.5 Kilos of rice/flour
	Harvesting	Bundle of harvested crops	One Bundle out of every 12 bundles
	Sowing	Grain	2.5 kilos of rice
	Normal Wage	Rice, Flour	3.5 Kilos of rice

*This is in case of 'attached labour'

Source: Study data based on surveyed households

It is the economic hardship that makes the husband and wife leave the house early in the morning and come back in the evening. They hardly have enough time to make a focused attempt at educating their children. Though not many children were found to be involved in full time occupations, there were some looking after the small

siblings or engaged in grazing the cattle. Some of the Mushar respondents put forth their views on why their children do not go to schools even if enrolled. They said that because the non-Mushar women largely stay at home they can look after the children even when the men go out to work, whereas it is impossible in their case because both men and women go out to work.

In fact one respondent put forth the point of 'facilities' available more to the '*Badkan ke laikan*' (children of other castes with higher ritual position). His notion of facility encompassed the issues of poverty and affluence, when he said that the upper caste (which is a relative term because it would include OBCs as well as savarna castes) children do not have to take their cattle for grazing or look after the smaller children. Even a morning breakfast before going to the school is an important facility that the other castes get but not the Mushars.

The Everyday Life of Mushars and their Participation in Local Culture

The everyday life of Mushars shows that they have not been part of the village affairs as other castes. Culturally, it would be flawed to presume a homogenous framework with all communities integrated as one, especially when the local societies are structurally so divided. However, after the onset of democratization processes and percolation of the slogans of development and equity one has seen the integration of OBCs and other Scheduled Caste communities taking place, in bodies such as VECs, PRIs etc. But, one finds no such enhanced participation of Mushars in the local village affairs.

We tried to look at their participation in the village festivals. In fact Mushars, in other villages of the district, have been found to be participating more religiously in only one festival – Jitiya. In other festivals such as Dussehra or Diwali their participation has been negligible. In fact, one of the respondents said that this community does not have any single festival to celebrate.

The Mushars participate in Dussehra festivals in Kasain but in a limited fashion. When asked, all of them said that they do participate in the puja as all other villagers. However, a close look told us that their participation is in form of musclemen, used

when funds are to be collected, when security is to be maintained during cultural programmes or when immersion of the idol takes place. Their participation is negligible in management of funds, rituals etc. Hence, the participation, which respondents happily acknowledged as if there is no discrimination, is pre-defined and functions within a set dominant cultural and social framework. The discrimination persists but in a changed manner.

In the panchayat meetings some, close to the camp of Mukhiya, said that the people are informed of the General Body Meeting through beating the drum but nobody turns up and ultimately the powerful people take the decision and get the quorum register signed. A Mushar respondent said that they are seldom invited for the meeting and even if they go they do not speak much because many a times the Mukhiya says that all the activities proposed or the agenda is for the benefit of the village and therefore should be supported. They are never revealed in detail the mechanism of how the PRIs work. Similarly, the Mushars hardly know about the VECs. The members know about the meetings, which are not held frequently. The VEC meets only when there is a pressure from the district or when certain kind of purchase is to be done or financial matters are to be discussed. The VECs are not popularly elected. At least the Mushar community was never taken into confidence when the VEC was constituted. Many respondents seemed casual about the VEC, which reflects on the need to popularize the notions and concepts of why decentralization and community participation is needed. If such an exercise is not taken, it is also in the interest of the local elite because once done it will threaten their entrenched position. However, in the case of Kasain village the numerical strength of Mushars does provide them some space in the committees and meetings. Many respondents said that they did not have time for such meetings because earning livelihood was more important for them.

The non-participation of Mushars also emerges from the cultural construct that portrays them as 'different', the 'other'. They are treated as a community incapable of doing 'intelligent' things. During group discussions when the Mushars said that one important reason for their children not being able to go to or remain in schools is

absence of a Mushar teacher. They felt that had there been a teacher from their community he would have been sensitive to the needs of their children. Other caste teachers looked down upon them and even thrashed their children for no reasons which forced many of the children to stay out of school. On one occasion when this point was raised by Mushars while sitting with other castes they were commented sarcastically by Bhuihars that 'should then somebody of the local community be made a teacher?'

The discriminatory attitude towards Mushars was also clear among the teachers. The headmaster of Godiha School repeatedly makes the point that that Mushars would never come to school because "*they do not have any tension about life, neither about what to wear or about future.*" He believed that the Mushars "*don't think about studying. Their children start earning at an early age... They neither understand their duties nor their rights.*" We asked the teachers to write an essay on why Mushars do not come to school and majority of them believed that Mushars are not interested in studying. They are unaware about the advantages of education. The headmaster of Kasain School went to the extent of saying that they do not know the meaning of education. He believed that their poverty, bad company, and lack of respect for good work deprive them of education. Interestingly some respondents believed that it is because of teachers that their children do not study. They have strong opinions about the education in the local school and education in general as seen above.

Conclusion

We have seen that the Mushars generally do not go to school, and even if they go, as in the case of current two villages, their number is less than other communities or they do not even complete primary schooling. This is in consonance with the over all scenario of dalits in the state, as shown above through NSS data. Even within the dalit conglomerate Mushars enrollment is lesser than others.

It has been seen above that one fundamental reason for their educational marginalization is their poverty and unaffordability of education. It is fundamental to have a certain income, which can facilitate the learning process among their children. The same poverty never allows them sufficient time to devote to their

children. The other reason is also lack of facilities in the local school, especially the basic requirements of rooms or teachers. The Mushars have not been able to become part of the mainstream development discourse, even if it mutilates the notion of 'education' and highlights 'literacy', because of their alienation from the local setting. Their participation in the traditional festivals as well as in the modern decentralized democratic mechanisms is minimal. It is a completely subjective investigation that is required to look at how a cultural construct has been created that categorizes them as responsible for their educational 'backwardness'. They are seen as people disinterested in education, who are always drunk and least bothered about the future of their children. Notions of this 'otherness' are so entrenched that even teachers believe that their children will not study. Though an illusion is created which provides a sense of participation to them during festivals but that participation itself is limited and predefined, which does not let the significant variables of power (such as participation in decision-making or management) percolate down to them.

Such a cultural construct in fact plays a significant role in what Bourdieu would call, cultural reproduction. The developments that take place outside the school, the overarching 'pedagogic action', play a significant role in the participation or withdrawal of Mushar's children in the educational process. The educational process needs to be sensitive to such elements which lead to marginalization of whole community. But the question which still remains is the why does this happen? Is it because the dominant elite in society seeks to maintain the status quo of structural inequalities, which in turn get reflected in the educational realities? One needs to locate the whole educational paradigm which exists in terms of an enterprise created by certain interests and with certain perspective and purpose. Unless that is understood it would be difficult to ascertain why for so long the issues of teaching pedagogy, the local cultural variance, structural inequalities etc. have not been addressed in a manner to incorporate the communities at margins of society.

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APPENDIX

Table: Literacy Rate of Different Scheduled Castes in Rural Bihar (1961-1991)

Sl. No	Castes	Population	1961			1971			1981			1991					
			Literacy		Total	Literacy		Total	Literacy		Total	Literacy		Total			
			M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total			
1	Ā̄ī	556675	0.9	5.0	7950652	1.9	1.0	6.5	0.44368	18.0	2.5	0.4	9749083	30.6	1.1	19.5	
2	Bāī̄ār	45048	3.4	2.3	12.5	53264	7.0	0.3	3.7	66026	9.6	0.6	5.2	65446	20.4	3.7	12.4
3	Bāū̄r	76057	10.8	0.6	5.8	95260	0.2	0.8	5.8	10314	19.1	2.7	11.2	96906	35.2	7.6	22.0
4	Bhō̄gta	8733	5	0.5	4.4	104790	6.6	0.5	3.6	37175	11.6	1.2	6.4	12635	24.9	4.5	13.6
5	Ā̄ī̄r	533	..	3.3	6.6	2139	6.8	0.2	3.6	465	13.4	2.0	7.3	2585	34.8	4.9	24.2
6	Bhō̄lyā̄	360495	2.6	0.4	1.3	43896	2.9	0.1	1.5	850459	7.7	0.8	4.3	75574	14.5	2.7	8.9
7	Bhā̄mārā̄ngā	1595179	2.3	0.3	0.3	2382440	13.1	1.0	1.0	2978562	20.5	2.4	1.5	2915413	35.3	7.1	24.8
8	Bhā̄raū̄ā	10214	1.6	0.5	7.5	24114	4.4	0.8	7.7	44372	16.0	1.5	8.8	39086	29.0	5.4	15.8
9	Bāū̄ār	3104	25.7	4.5	15.2	397	28.8	1.8	15.5	5538	37.2	6.6	22.3	8737	42.8	3.2	29.2
10	Bhō̄lō	352245	8.4	1.7	10.0	4333317	21.3	2.5	11.9	553280	30.7	5.9	18.6	544520	43.2	4.2	32.3
11	Bhā̄ārā̄	158638	8.5	0.8	4.8	165228	9.0	0.9	5.1	200327	13.4	2.1	8.0	192745	26.3	7.1	17.2
12	Bhā̄sāch, Dhā̄rī	1724555	3.5	0.9	7.1	2105413	4.5	1.1	8.0	2655332	21.5	3.0	12.4	257105	35.1	8.4	22.9
13	Bhā̄ārā̄	55034	14.4	3.7	9	7361	4.7	2.0	8.2	84756	23.5	5.6	14.7	77800	36.6	3.5	25.4
14	Bhā̄ārā̄	2947	21.4	2.7	11.1	5267	20.1	1.9	10.4	5463	31.8	6.9	19.4	7872	39.2	2.2	26.2
15	Bhā̄ārā̄, Bhā̄ārā̄	9062	8.9	2.4	10.5	114956	17.4	2.6	19.1	156349	26.8	5.7	16.6	146402	38.6	3.4	26.9
16	Bhā̄ārā̄	445	4.5	2.5	9.0	3152	12.6	0.8	4.5	1760	17.8	4.7	1.3	4336	5.0	4.5	0.7
17	Bhā̄ārā̄	32	1.0	0.0	5.4	1711	3.8	1.1	7.6	4449	7.4	3.3	0.5	823	30.2	8.8	19.5
18	Bhā̄ārā̄	336	17.9	0.8	11.3	159	24.7	3.5	14.2	952	30.1	5.2	18.2	374	30.6	12.2	21.7
19	Bhā̄ārā̄	1007340	3.6	0.6	2	1168447	2.4	0	1.3	1391000	4.0	0.3	2.2	130073	7.7	1.3	4.6
20	Bhā̄ārā̄	12152	8.1	2.4	5.4	17431	8.3	2.6	5.6	24897	13.2	3.9	8.5	23633	20.6	6.2	13.8
21	Bhā̄ārā̄, Sawās	1467	22.1	2.0	12.4	27531	26.9	3.3	15.3	28931	42.4	11.3	27.0	25855	47	19.1	33.9
22	Bhā̄ārā̄	260087	18.0	1.6	10.0	333765	20.6	2.2	11.7	463801	28.7	5.7	17.6	455126	44.5	12.9	29.6
23	Bhā̄ārā̄	15574	9.4	0.3	4.9	193686	10.1	0.5	5.4	237370	16.6	.5	9.2	27103	29.6	5.2	18.0
24	Tū̄	90436	38	0.6	4.7	103434	9.1	0.7	4.9	13334	14.3	1.7	8.1	132213	28.5	6.5	17.9
25	Jā̄clā̄ss̄ed	153882	12.3	.4	6.4	98770	18.4	3.3	10.2								

Source: Based on calculations from Census data for children above seven years of age.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES: THE CASE OF THE DALITS OF MAHARASHTRA

by
Padma Velaskar

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITIES: THE CASE OF THE DALITS OF MAHARASHTRA¹

Padma Velaskar

Introduction

In India, issues of educational equality/inequality are closely tied to the educational participation of those segments of caste-patriarchal society who were traditionally debarred from formal education – untouchables, shudras and women. Their educational inclusion, which occurred under the impact of colonialism, was minimal and largely restricted to certain regions that witnessed heightened educational activity as a result of the efforts of colonial state, missionaries and “native” actors of varied social origins and ideological motivations. The post colonial period has seen the contradictory picture of significant educational progress of the historically excluded, yet their continued educational “backwardness”. Educational exclusion and inequality thus continue to remain salient issues on the national agenda. Glaring inequalities persist in educational access, retention and achievement between the genders and between dalits, adivasis and other ethnic minorities on the one hand, and the traditionally privileged higher caste/class segments of society on the other. Over the years, an outpouring of research studies have laid bare the varied types and patterns of educational inequality.

Despite such incriminating evidence however, there have been few efforts at providing comprehensive and compelling theoretical explanations of educational inequality. A host of factors pertaining to antecedent social status such as familial/home background, cultural influences or school related factors have been studied in an isolationist, fragmented manner and claimed to be explanations. Perhaps because of its preoccupation with current policy concerns, research has also displayed a strong functionalist orientation attempting to identify ‘dysfunctionalities’ in schooling systems providing solutions towards educational problems and making education more ‘functional’ to society. The bulk of research has been largely ahistorical, atheoretical, and empiricist in nature failing to take into account historical,

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structural and ideological contexts and factors. It thus fails to provide a structural understanding of the relationship between education and society. Research has also been grounded explicitly or implicitly in theories of modernization and developmentalism that view education's role as central to these processes. The practical concern is with identifying education's successes and failures vis-à-vis national development goals. Given that the state bears the exclusive responsibility of providing mass-education, the role of state policy and its implementation have, from the outset, been targets of critical analysis. Critical examinations of the functioning and processes of schools as agencies of equalising opportunity have unravelled the multiple ways in which they serve as significant sources of educational inequality.

A disconcerting trend in recent educational analysis is almost an exclusive preoccupation with state schooling-related exclusionary and discriminatory practices and the virtual neglect of the role of social structural and cultural forces. Indeed there is a marked tendency to view schooling systems as things unto themselves and delinked from society. Considering their fundamental historical role in determining educational access, the changing pattern of traditional stratification system of caste-patriarchy are not being brought to bear upon and systematically woven into explanations of educational inequalities except under the rubries of 'poverty', or through the use of crude measures of 'socio-economic status' that constitute simplifications if not distortions of complex social reality and processes of schooling systems themselves as significantly shaped by larger configurations and forces of structural inequality towards its reproduction (Velaskar, 2001).

Caste, gender and class (proxied by indices of socio-economic status) have been used as formal categories of differentiation with a view to describing the pattern of educational distribution among different groups. However they have not been used as processual and relational categories to understand how they shape educational opportunities and achievements. Fundamentally, the problem arises from the fact that barring a few exceptions (for example, Acharya, 1987; Kumar, 1989, 1991; Kamat, 1985) the modes of problem formulation and analysis in educational research have not been consciously rooted in critical sociological theory or political economy. To that extent the analyses have remained partial and unable to pinpoint complex interconnection between society, culture and education. In grappling with problems of educational exclusion and access of the traditionally disprivileged, we need to examine the reality of schooling within a general framework of societal and state-societal relations. There is need to work on and develop such frameworks

that explicate/articulate the role of both social structural and educational aspects that would help analyse educational realities better.

This paper is concerned with exploring the relationship between structural inequalities and educational inequalities. Educational inequality has multiple bases in the structures of caste, class, gender and ethnicity, in political economy. A basic premise of the paper is that education as a social institution is part of and a subsystem within the social structure. Though it has potential as a "relatively autonomous" actor, it is more of a dependent variable. It is the argument of this paper that structural social inequalities and the complex forms they have taken today are strong forces in the maintenance of educational inequality.

The paper aims at illustrating this basic argument through a case study of the interactive impact of processes of caste, class and gender on the education of dalits of Maharashtra (the term dalits is used here to refer to former untouchable communities). It attempts to analyse the consequences of three historically interlocking systems of caste-untouchability, class and patriarchy for school educational access and participation of dalits. These traditional systems have undergone tremendous change and assumed complex forms during the ascendance of capitalist economies and labour markets and system of political democracy. The paper explores how the contemporary processes of caste, class and gender mediating through community, family, culture, ideology directly/indirectly affect or influence educational access and participation of dalit children. Cognisance of the interactive influence of caste, class and patriarchal forces help understand the gender dimension of the dalit educational situation. Dalit women have hitherto been subsumed under the homogenising categories of either 'woman' or 'dalit'. Dalit is also not a homogenous category in terms of caste and increasingly in terms of class. Dalit castes have traditionally existed in a hierarchy and have different historical experiences. As we shall see, there exist today, sharp inter and intra-caste disparities, caste, class and cultural between and within 'dalits'.

The focus on Maharashtra underscores the need for a comparative approach that examines and compares specific contexts and unravels commonalities and differences between major Indian states. This would lead to greater insight into educational problems (Altbach et. al., 1982). Maharashtra's dalits have made rapid socio-economic and educational progress as compared to their counterparts in other large Indian states. The state has achieved high levels of economic development and urban growth as well as experienced the liberatory impact of vibrant social movements (including a powerful dalit one), that have earned it a reputation of social progressivism. It is thus instructive to study the changing post

colonial educational situation of Maharashtra's dalits and to ascertain how far they have overcome historical barriers to access.

The discussion is organised in two parts. The first provides the backdrop. It takes a historical overview of dalit access to education in the state, capturing the main forces of educational change. It next analyses recent trends in educational advance examining temporal change in levels of caste and gender disparity, regional variations and intra caste variations. The second section explores changing structures and cultural patterns of caste, class and gender inequalities with a view to identifying facilitative factors that have made for educational advance as well as structural obstacles that are responsible for continued educational exclusion and inequality for the dalits. The paper is based on secondary sources, statistical analysis of educational data and primary data collected by the author in the course of her research on dalits (Velaskar, 1998 (b): 2004).

DALIT ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN MAHARASHTRA: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND CONTEMPORARY PATTERNS

Colonial and Post Colonial Beginnings of Dalit Education

Of Maharashtra's dalits, the Mahars were first accorded entry in schools by the missionaries and colonial powers, albeit with differing social motives. Ever since, the dalits have waged a long and bitter struggle for formal educational access fighting caste based exclusion and discrimination and asserting their right to education. The struggle continues to present times. It is important to note that dalit women's entry coincided with dalit men's, in the context of Phule's anti-caste movement which also incorporated a radical anti-patriarchal programme. Conducive conditions for an enhanced if conflictual educational access of dalit men as well as women were created. Actual progress was slow and halting in the nineteenth century. It was heavily constrained by the scanty material resources at the disposal of low caste revolutionaries, shrewd and restrictive colonial educational policy and virulent opposition from Brahmin orthodoxy. From the early to mid-twentieth century, the Satyashodhak, non-Brahman dalit reformist and dalit radical movements inspired a flowering of educational activity and contributed to some further educational spread among dalits and other lower castes. However the loss of revolutionary egalitarianism of the non-Brahmin occurred in its substitution by narrow sectarianism and in the gradual demise of Phule's radical gender agenda. Political and educational action became geared to advancing the material interests of the politically powerful non-Brahman castes. The sole exception was

Shinde's long rural campaign for extending primary education to lower castes and women (Gore, 1980). It was thus left to the incipient dalit movement to launch its own initiatives (Omvedt, 1976; Gore, 1989; O'Hanlon, 1985; Velaskar, 1998; Zelliot, 2002). The early reformist phase witnessed a number of pioneering educational institutions despite a frenzy of caste violence. Satyashodhak and Hindu social reformist influences were evident in the starting of special girls' schools. Thus dalit women's education continued to be closely related to dalit men's education. Social reformist, nationalist or the early women's movement made minimal direct difference to their lot (Velaskar, 2001(a)).

However, it was the Ambedkarian movement (which inspired sustained revolutionary protest action by dalits against the Hindu social order for three long decades), that laid the basis for a wider expansion of education as well as for the wider dissemination of Ambedkar's ideological vision for education in dalit liberation. The motto of "Educate, Agitate, Organise" reverberated in dalit communities in many parts of the state and had a palpable impact in terms of missionary motivation and zeal to educate the community. Like Phule, Ambedkar realised the need to provide for the education of his people. The establishment of People's Education Society in 1951 constituted a milestone in dalit educational struggle. Dalit women's education was most vigorously emphasized by Ambedkar, who drew their political participation and encouraged education and cultural change for them (Velaskar, *ibid*).

In post-colonial Maharashtra, expansion of education and compensatory discrimination in education constituted the two-pronged official strategy of equalisation. Political commitments towards rural interests and the dynamic history of social reform and anti-caste movements, fuelled processes of democratisation of education and the spread of rural education (Rosenthal, 1973). The expansion of educational facilities was the result of a public demand for education as well as state response to the provision of education. However, from the outset the rapid spread of educational institutions was a highly imbalanced one that reflected the pattern of a politically motivated, regionally imbalanced and inequitable capitalist economic growth.

Within the post-independence socio-political context of elite Maratha dominance and political containment of dalit protest, education gained primacy over political struggle among common dalits. It became the most viable, practical and quite simply, the most available means through which they would attempt to break their shackles and attain freedom and dignity. Under the Ambedkarian impact it had come to hold a special symbolic, material and

political significance in the social consciousness of dalits. However, given that both the post-colonial state and political leadership were constituted by it, the dominant Maratha-Brahmin elite alliance took control of education. The period saw continued practice of patronage that catered to the educational demands of political, bureaucratic and intellectual classes. Educational interests of the oppressed groups were brushed under the carpet and state educational provisions and facilities which were the rightful due of the dalits were grudgingly implemented. The hierarchical ideologies of caste and untouchability were strongly present within the secular public spheres and had to be continually contested. There were exceptions viz. educational societies and institutions that were inspired by progressive ideologies, which accorded open access to dalits. On the whole however, the educational struggle was long and hard since first generation dalit learners had to overcome old and new structural forces viz. semi-feudal service, poverty, social stigma and social discrimination, to gain an education. The Mahars were at the forefront of inspired educational struggles and were followed closely by the Chambhars (Velaskar, 1998a). The Ambedkar ideology has been a key durable factor that has affected dalit educational experience in post-colonial times.

The situation got reflected in the slow and gradual progress of dalit education in the early post independence period. The share of dalit enrolment did not match their percentage in the population even till 1974-75 (Kamat, 1985). Dalit boys were in a better position vis-à-vis the girls. The latter had meagre enrolment shares even at the primary stage and even worse at the higher. The great impact of the dalit movement and Phule Ambedkarian ideology was largely restricted to boys as transformative action on dalit women's behalf virtually came to a standstill. As a consequence and given the general educational backwardness of all women at the time, it was not surprising that dalit girls fared poorly. Faster growth rates than boys were not sufficient to close the gender gap which existed at all levels of school education but was more pronounced at higher levels (Kamat, 1985).

Quantitative Expansion and Equity: Recent Trends

The eighties marked a turning point. The decade saw a remarkable expansion and growth in boys and girls enrolment in both absolute as well as relative terms. Tables 1 to 5 (which are based on Government of Maharashtra and Census data) provide some recent trends in educational access for dalits vis à vis others. A precise understanding of quantitative educational progress is handicapped as usual by the nature and quality of available data. We see from Table 1 that actual enrolments increased dramatically from 1981-82 to 1993-94 and growth rate for dalit boys and girls outstripped that of general category

boys and girls at the elementary stage (I-VII) at 76.7 and 324.3 per cent respectively. At the secondary level, dalit boys enrolment and dalit girls enrolment more than doubled. Enrolment ratios presented in Table 2, though they are certainly inflated due to the inclusion of overage, nevertheless confirm the main historical trend of accommodation of an increasing proportion of dalits: more boys still than girls but there is now an increasing proportion of the latter. A dramatic swelling of dalit enrolment ratios has been witnessed at the primary level. Middle and secondary enrolment too has considerably advanced in the decade of the eighties for both dalit boys and girls. Their enrolment ratios today surpass those of general category at the secondary level. Despite the inadequacy of enrolment ratios as valid indicators of "real" progress, they nevertheless point out to the great spurt that has occurred in secondary enrolment for dalits.

Quantitative educational progress may be judged in another way through comparing enrolment percentage with population percentage. Dalit males constitute 11.04 per cent of the total male population and dalit females constitute 11.16 per cent of the total female population of Maharashtra. At the lower primary and upper primary levels, the per cent enrolment of dalit boys had outstripped their population percentage at the end of the seventies. But girls lagged behind boys at the upper primary and secondary levels. The situation improved dramatically at all levels for dalit girls between 1981-82 and 1993-94. By the end of the nineties both dalit girls and boys had consolidated their advance and both registered higher enrolments than population percentages at all levels of school education and also at the higher secondary level (Table 3).

Gender distribution of enrolment further attests to a rise in women's representation among both the dalit and general population at all levels of education. Schooling was certainly male dominated upto the end of the seventies. But things have changed and latest figures show that girls' enrolment is impressive at more than 45 per cent of the total in both categories at the primary and upper primary levels (Table 4). However, there continues to be somewhat greater disparity at the secondary level where the female enrolment percentages are 43 and 42 respectively for general and dalit girls.

Retention at a particular stage of education and progression between education stages are both crucial tests of educational opportunity. Macro and micro studies of dropout, wastage and stagnation conducted in rural Maharashtra bring out sharp caste and gender differences in educational progress between levels that remain hidden in state enrolment data. Dalits lag behind in terms of completion of elementary and secondary schooling. The studies

have also brought out differentiation in educational attainment and economic status within dalits (Kamat, 1985; Henriques & Wankhede, 1985; Gogate, 1986; Bernstein, n.d.; Chitnis and Velaskar, 1988; Wankhede, 1998; 2002; Acharya, 2001; Kulkarni, 2001; Velaskar 2004). Our own calculations of continuation rates based on most recent statistics point to some changes. They revealed that drop out of dalits continues to be higher than non be students at all stages. Dalit girls dropout is lower than that of dalit boys at the lower primary but not at the upper primary level. It is higher than non be girls at both levels. But at the secondary stage dalit girls' drop out is lower than nbe girls as well as dalit boys. The gender difference in drop out within dalits too is smaller than the earlier stage. This seems to indicate that dalit girls who survive the elementary level to enter secondary school stay on till the end. For non-be girls on the contrary this is the critical stage of drop out (Velaskar, 2004). We need more extensive analysis however before we arrive at any firm conclusion.

Data on school attendance, a more authentic indicator of educational advance, is provided by the Census. The limitation of the Census data is that we do not have an idea of the stage at which children are attending school. Table 5 based on Census figures reveals that dalit boys lag behind general boys in school attendance in the 6-9 years age group. However they surpass general attendance rate in the higher age groups. This perhaps indicates the tendency towards late enrolment of dalits. A bleak picture is revealed for dalit girls. It shows that their attendance is lower than dalit boys attendance and general category girls' in all four age groups. Attendance rates are highest for girls of both categories in the 10-12 years age group indicating fair retention at the elementary stage. They fall significantly in the higher age groups of 13-15 years and 16-17 years indicating withdrawal. The table further reveals that inter-caste disparity for the boys and girls is lower than intra-caste gender disparity. The gender gap is higher within dalits than within the general category.

On the whole the data suggests the impressive advance of dalit boys' education vis-à-vis general boys. They also suggest that gender constraints continue to affect participation of girls belonging to both categories.

Intra Caste and Inter District Disparities

Intra-dalit disparities are a historical legacy. We need to know to what extent the disparities have declined between Mahars/Neo-Buddhists and Chambhars on the one hand and the Mangs and other smaller dalit castes on the other, with respect to girls' educational access. The Mahar (most are now Buddhists), Mang and Chambhar castes constitute an

overwhelming proportion (80%) of the dalits in the state. Five castes viz. Bhangi, Lingader, Khatik, Holar and Dhor together constitute 8.42 percent. The remaining 51 castes constitute the rest (Wankhede, 2002). The neo-Buddhists and Chamhars have achieved far superior education levels than the rest. In recent times, some others such as Dhor, Khatik and Lingader have achieved better progress. But the overall picture is of low schooling attainments (Velaskar, 2001(b); Wankhede, 2002).

The situation of regional imbalances in socio-economic development and in historical diffusion of schooling has changed. In an overwhelming number of districts today, both dalit girls' and boys' enrolment level surpasses their population percentage at the primary level. Erstwhile backward districts have registered significant quantitative progress towards accessing elementary education. There are only a few districts where dalit enrolment is unsatisfactory and gender disparity and drop out rates are very high at the primary stage. There are some very advanced districts where dalit enrolment is higher by 5 percentage points or more than population percentage. They are drawn from all regions of the state.

At the secondary level though, the picture changes markedly, with ten districts which do not record higher enrolment than population percentage in dalit girls' education. For dalit boys, the corresponding number of districts is six. Importantly some of the socio-economically advanced districts (from western Maharashtra) figure along with erstwhile backward districts (of Marathawada) in these lists.

All districts of Konkan and most from the Vidarbha region show considerable advance at all levels and greatest gender equity. Some districts of Vidarbha for e.g. Nagpur, Wardha show spectacular advance of dalit girls. Their ratio to non-dalit girls crosses 100 at all three levels. Clearly Vidarbha contributes in large measure to the much improved picture regarding dalit education in Maharashtra.

Drop out level and lower attendance rates in higher age-groups suggest that despite increasing access, opportunities at secondary level are far from equalised. Boys are at a distinct comparative advantage.

Summing up

To sum up, the analysis suggests a changing, complex and contradictory educational advance for the dalits. The picture is of course mainly in the form of broad trends and needs to be studied comprehensively and in depth. Obviously there has been an unprecedented expansion of dalit access to schooling, the hallmark of which is a post 80's quantitative spurt

in enrolment, including that of dalit girls. Both boys and girls' educational access to elementary levels of schooling has widened dramatically. Dalit boys have been more successful in closing the enrolment and attendance gap between them and their high-caste counterparts at all levels. However access has not equalised in terms of retention and drop out for boys, indicating caste inequality. Disparities are more conspicuous in certain districts but the overall situation in all districts has improved. Gender equalisation in terms of retention, even at the elementary level is still very elusive for dalit girls as also for non-dalit girls. The staying power of dalit girls continues to be adversely affected. Opportunities for secondary education have also opened up and have been considerably availed by dalit boys and girls. There has been a steady increase in the proportion of dalit girls passing through secondary school, though their proportionate representation is less than at primary. Importantly, inter-caste disparity in educational attendance is smaller than intra-caste gender-disparity for dalits as well as non-dalits. Thus high rates of growth registered by dalit girls have been insufficient to wipe out historical disadvantage. Gender thus continues to be a strong constraining factor even when caste bias is overcome. However intra-caste disparities also persist within the dalits.

Overall, the schooling situation of dalits can be summed up as one of definitive quantitative advance not marked by continuing disadvantage. Though neither dalit castehood nor gender have remained definitive predictors of educational access today, the available evidence from macro trends and micro studies strongly suggest that they continue to be highly relevant.

Furthermore, though it is not the primary thrust of analysis in this paper, it needs to be stated in order to give a more complete picture of unequal education opportunity that the issue of learning achievement in general and in particular of historically disadvantaged sections has assumed serious proportions in Maharashtra (Aikara, 1997; Bertsen, n.d.). There are gross inequalities in learning outcomes and levels of scholastic attainment between higher caste / class groups and the dalits and others such as adivasis and denotified tribes.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND EDUCATIONAL ACCESS OF DALITS

In this section of the paper we explore and attempt to account for the patterns of dalit educational inequality through an examination of processes and factors of social change in stratificatory systems and cultural change in the ideological processes. The focus is on postulating connections between dominant structural subordination patterns enmeshed in

changing relations of caste, class and gender and the dalit educational situation. As mentioned at the outset of the paper, atheoretical and monolithic approaches have precluded social contextualisation and the examination of the interactive influence of caste, class and gender in relation to educational expansion. Changes in the structures of inequality and socio-economic position of dalits were brought about by a constellation of factors in Maharashtra. Capitalist economy, state positive discrimination policy, secularisation of public institutional spaces, the politics of untouchability through the means of party and social movement, and the women's movement are some of the macro forces that have operated. Capitalist developments in agriculture, agro-industry, industrial and tertiary sectors expanded opportunities for dalits in caste free, non-agricultural occupations. Secularisation and class formation created structural conditions for the acceptance of new parameters and gradations of prestige and status. The politics of untouchability incorporated 1) a reformist consensual approach based on a mixed model of sanskritisation and westernisation and 2) a conflict-radical one rooted in Ambedkarian ideology of transformation. Both have brought about a measure of social change. The second phase of the women's movement provided the impetus for changes in gender status and relations.

What is the relationship between the changing but polarised structures of inequality and education? In what specific ways do evolving patterns of caste, class and gender inequality account for marked improvement in educational access as well as continuing backwardness? What explains the persistent gender gap in educational attainment among dalits? In the discussion that follows we first attempt to draw the linkages between dalit location in changing structures of inequality and their educational access. The analysis is primarily based on data collected during the field research conducted by the author. The discussion is organised under three themes pertaining to the three forms of structural inequality that are the concern of this paper - 1) caste, caste cultural processes and education exclusion, 2) class, caste-class cultures and dalit education, 3) gender, caste, class and education.

Caste, Caste-Cultural Processes and Educational Exclusion

The transformation of caste has been a subject of much sociological attention and investigation. The main bone of contention has been whether caste has broken down and given way to class. The debate has not been satisfactorily resolved, but the position that there is a coexistence of caste (in substantialised forms, as status groups and ethnic groups) with class is accepted. Dalits of each caste continue to be largely if not overwhelmingly located at

the bottom (Omvedt, 1992). Yet we must be aware of the "caste factor" – v.z. of the positioning and location of caste groups today, the contemporary social constructions of caste through its interactions with class, gender, politics and culture, and the forms in which the caste ideology of hierarchy and purity and pollution is rearticulated and practised. Casteism is the loose term given to discriminatory beliefs and practices but it has not been systematically defined or debated.

In Maharashtra, the ritual hierarchy of caste continues to exist despite the overall breakdown of the structures of untouchability. The dalit movement has not brought about equal change for all caste groups, some of whom exist in pristine oppression. There are still entire caste groups – "caste minorities" to borrow Ogbu's useful term (Ogbu, 1978) who live in segregated spaces and most depressed environments of work and life in rural and urban locations. They are those who have been excluded from, marginalized by, or left behind by economic development processes. Besides dalits, the most downtrodden communities include obes, denotified and nomadic tribes, and adivasis, who have been intrinsically stigmatized on the basis of untouchability, primitiveness or savageness, nomadism or criminality. They are all now treated like inferior castes. Among dalits, from the numerically larger category of Maungs, to others such as Khatiks, Holars, Bhangi-Mehtars continue to wallow at bottom ends of social hierarchy. Though large numbers have moved to agricultural or other forms of rural labour, extreme impoverishment sustains caste labour, servitude and bonded labour. They still engage in demeaning caste linked occupations under archaic and stringent relationships. Traditional subservience is buttressed by old social practices and new economic relations: Immersing poverty or a very weak and nebulous economic base under traditional relations of production, inferior legal status, territorial separation and subordination are main features of social life that make for cumulative, systematic disprivilege. Despite an overall scaling down of pollution barriers, public and private untouchability is still practised against these castes.

Society has no qualms about designating them as lowly, despicable, criminal or to constructing them, their cultures, traits and languages pathologically. Casteism operates blatantly in exclusion of these minorities from social life, including modern relations and institutions including schools. Though schools have been an arena of inclusion, those communities considered most lowly and engaged in unclean occupations have suffered invidious treatment and been kept illiterate for long periods (Gare and Limaye, 1973).

Community and home life of groups located in these lowermost recesses of society is fundamentally incongruent with the demands of education. There is a cultural disconnection, if not conflict, between home and school due to the forced traditionalism that arises out of social oppression. Work patterns and cultural expectations of children are defined in terms of the rhythms of life and survival, and the informal learning that these groups historically impart are completely out of tune with contents and routines of school. Children who grow up in such harsh rural environments are basically prepared for an adult life of struggle based on shared perceptions that arise from shared experiences of oppression. They are provided family/community based skills, knowledge and attitudes which will enable them to do so. Child labour is both value and necessity and hence non-negotiable.

With rapid social change surrounding them, caste minorities are not unchanging in cultural socialisation practices and social aspirations. There is certainly a growing aspiration for and "interest" in education among even the most oppressed of sections as several studies have noted. It is very strongly connected to the desire for their children to have a better life. But caste minorities are pervasively controlled by outside social forces that keep them as such. Education even if desired, does not, cannot figure concretely and centrally in the relevant scheme of things. Extreme poverty, starvation, lack of clothing and money for school expenses are strong deterrents to schooling. Families don't have the cultural wherewithal either for meaningful accessing of school. School survival and success are difficult and remote, and cannot be pursued since it is impossible to build systematic or serious motivation. Parents' concerns with betterment of children's futures are swamped by immediate survival and livelihood concerns. The ground level conditions and experiences of life of communities and families make for realistic assessment of future prospects and cultural explanations that ensure that the motives for education are different.

Thus rather than "educational problems" there is a problem of education in caste minorities, which is associated with and generated by structural and historical barriers that have proved immutable. The continued location as outcastes keeps children away or channels them only briefly into school.

Class, Caste-Class Cultures and Dalit Education

Socio-economic development in the state had an erosive impact on caste and generated a 'caste-free' class but polarised formation and transition in rural and urban contexts. The new caste-linked class hierarchy has had a contradictory impact on the dalits.

On the one hand, dalits have experienced socio-economic advance as reflected in impressive levels of literacy and education, occupational differentiation and upward social mobility and higher incomes. On the other hand however, given the context of a distorted and skewed pattern of growth, they have been the greater victims of the proletarianisation and pauperising process (Omvedt, 1992). Obviously dalit experiences today can not be wholly explained in terms of caste discrimination. Class and class formation are important for making sense of their current situation. Dalits occupy positions in the class structure. By corollary, there is a class structure, albeit qualitatively distinct, within dalits as well. It is important to understand the implications of the inter-related dynamics of caste, class (and later gender) for education. In order to understand the unfolding situation and its relationship to education, it will be important to understand (a) the nature of caste and class and how they interact / coexist under capitalist economy in Maharashtra (b) the spread of dalits across modern class hierarchy and (c) the nature of class status and cultural differentiation within dalits.

At the top of the urban class hierarchy are those who were able to make the "class transition" to middle class status. Education, upward occupational mobility (through reservations) and urban migration have been key factors in dalit middle class formation, which now comprises the "elite", the middle classes and low middle classes. Modern rural class structures, though not absolutely correlated, have a strong link with caste. Dalits are predominantly agricultural labourers but are also engaged in non-agricultural labour, petty production and marginal peasantry (Omvedt, 1992). In both urban and rural contexts where dalits have turned middle class or lower middle class due to occupational income change, education has been firmly established. It is these segments that reflect dalit educational advance. Cultural and symbolic factors have been important for Buddhists, among whom the Ambedkarite movement has set in motion irreversible cultural process in favour of education. Various organisations social, political and cultural, all functioning within the overarching Ambedkarian, Phule-Ambedkarian, Ambedkarian-Buddhist ideologies have worked to favourably mould dalit society's attitudes to education. Education was an issue of struggle during the radical phase of the Dalit-Panther movement. It has acted as a pressure group on issues of scholarship, reservation policy and caste discrimination in educational institutions. The protracted struggle over the renaming of Marathwada University after Ambedkar had a powerful ideological impact which contributed to enhanced educational participation in this region since the eighties. Despite lacking in material conditions, pre school values have been transferred to dalit families, and more so in regions where the dalit movement is powerful.

Despite the caste class shifts and ideological impact however, dalits entrenchment in caste segmented labour markets is a major constraint. They are concentrated in casual agricultural labour. Landlessness, poverty, economic vulnerability, low social status, discrimination and the pervading threat of atrocity govern the lives of dalit men and women in this class. The multistructural urban informal economy is also caste linked. Dalits are confined to hereditary occupations or to menial, lowly underpaid wage work. As greater victims of pauperising economic processes, both rural and urban poverty is disproportionately located within dalits. Within the poor there are levels and intensities of poverty. Most intense poverty conditions are marked by economic hardship, exploitation, insecurity, displacement, seasonality and mobility of work. They create debilitating, at times appallingly hazardous work, living and health environments. The educational situation in this class situation is analogous to that of the caste minorities. Livelihood, not education, is the dominant concern. The living environment as well as economic conditions are detriments to schooling. They continue to directly limit educational access and maintain the gap between educational access and educational reality.

Cultures too are growing increasingly complex and differentiated and within dalits one may find as many subcultures as classes. Cultural analyses need to point out how dominant cultural forms are shaping cultures of oppression in new ways. Cultural environments overlaid by vestiges of casteism and untouchability are now complexly re-constituted by structural conditions of unemployment and the prevalence of consumerist and consumption cultures. Feudal values in combination with economic and cultural effects of capitalism create a peculiar context of subordinate cultures within lower classes, including among the dalits. Material and cultural conditions erode caste-community, kin, family relations based on traditional solidarity and reciprocal relations. They are replaced by forces of criminalization, lumpenisation and erotisation with an emphasis on leisure, entertainment, consumption. At the same time, old group values, systems of meaning and belief, custom and mores remain embedded in social consciousness as a result of casteism in society. The cultures are deleterious as educational environments and serve to delegitimise aspirations, lower self confidence and limit educational retention and achievement.

Families are principal units of class stratification and principal agents in shaping children's learning experiences and achievement in all social classes (Beteille, 1991). They are embedded in and shared by the wider caste/class structural and cultural forces described above. Low caste and class families are oriented in different ways to child's learning

experiences that may be disadvantageous to educational retention and achievement. Homes have a deficit of cultural capital that is required by and in schools in a very 'real' and not in any 'derogatory' sense. By drawing attention to familial and cultural influences within dalit communities, there is no intention to pathologize or define as deficient, these ways of life. It is to point out the significance of caste and class cultures as structurally caused ways of living that are detrimental to schooling decisions.

A number of microlevel studies of dalit education in Maharashtra have pointed out to the critical importance of modes of family organisation, economic and cultural condition, in constraining the education of the lower class / poor dalit child (Henriques and Wankhede, 1985, Wankhede, 1999, Gogate, 1986, Ranasubhe et al, 1997, Velaskar, 1998 (b)). Research has also indicated that a relatively higher (viz. lower middle class status) certainly anticipates and strives for upward mobility. In such families, parents are aware of the marketability of education and attempt to sustain the education of children.

At the other end of the spectrum, dalit middle class families may also lack, or have in inadequate quantity, the cultural capital necessary for schooling skills and motivation. Their resources are invested to strengthen newly achieved middle class status. In sum, caste class formations vary by social, cultural and economic capital that is possessed and this has serious implications for educational attainment. Rising enrolment figures show the impact of ideology, class formation and mobility, but the final limits are set by caste and class linked material status and cultural factors.

Gender, Caste, Class and Education

Having always been constituted by public and private patriarchy in terms of gender divisions of labour and ideologies of sexual control, dalit women's educational access has been constrained by forces of caste, class and of course gender. Traditionally family socialisation of dalit girls' has been primarily oriented towards their participation in the caste gender division of labour in the public domain and gender division of labour in the private.

As the historical overview revealed, contemporary educational participation of dalit girls has been tied to the fortunes of their caste communities. Within these, like the boys it is tied to class status and unlike boys to gender ideologies and practices of their families. Within the social contexts of the downtrodden castes earlier described, social relations and ideologies are strongly patriarchal and girls suffer blatant discrimination. Educational access is nearly forbidden to girls and customary law and customs restrict girls to community

ordained activities in this day and age. Families that defy the caste order face the threat of ostracism or expulsion. Early marriage of girls is seen as a way of reducing the economic burden in the present context of immiserising poverty and livelihood insecurity. In the poorest and the low status communities, girls are married young - from twelve to seventeen years of age. In communities where they are now being "sent" to school there is no particular thinking or planning involved as far as educational goals are concerned. The value of schooling for girls is articulated in an ambiguous way - so that she may "read four books" and become "shahani" (wise). For the girls, education entails the double burden of home and school. Education levels for them are fixed so as to not deter marriage chances and they appear to increase in direct proportion to levels acceptable to prospective bridegrooms. Besides, there is reluctance to send girls to far away schools for upper primary or secondary education on grounds of sexual safety or dire need to shoulder domestic labour.

In general, there is no consideration for the desires and aspirations of the girls themselves. The most to suffer are educationally motivated girls of lower class caste groups whose aspirations are brutally stunted. Some of them are truly attracted to school, are good in studies and want to learn and better their life prospects. But these ambitions cannot be pursued. Poverty, the ideals of sexuality and domesticity prevalent constitute the material cultural base for keeping marriage central to the lives of girls. Together they spell educational and social deprivation. In such contexts, patriarchal ideology serves to legitimise female child labour, non-enrolment or early withdrawal of girls.

For girls belonging to the upwardly mobile aspirant classes families set limits depending on material situations, including material dependence on girls, or perceptions of future job market opportunity. In the caste/gendered segmentation of the labour market women are disproportionately found in agricultural/rural labour, traditional domestic, low skilled, low status, or caste related (sweeping - scavenging) services in rural sectors. In urban sectors, poor women are located in lowly unskilled, low status feminised service sectors in urban informal economy. Educational careers of most dalit girls are shaped by this structure. Largely dalit girls' educational aspirations are decisively shaped by labour requirements of the domestic and public economies and gender ideologies of marriage. In low class dalit families, even if public education is free and available, family strategies of female labour utilisation clearly mean greater opportunity costs of educating girls than boys, resulting in a denial of schooling to girls.

The link between caste, class and gender is evident in the intra-caste and inter-class differences in dalit girls' educational access. The escalating trends are a product of class formation wherein middle and low middle class families' girls' access has followed that of boys. The processes of social mobility and middle class formation have had a favourable impact on girls belonging to the Buddhist and Chamābhār communities. The combined impact of Ambedkar ideology and the women's movement of the eighties served as a great impetus to invest in dalit girls' education. Despite the Ambedkarian ideological emphasis enhancing women's status, educational action of behalf of dalit women almost came to a standstill. Changes in social values and beliefs about women's proper place were reflected to radicalise social actions in favour of women. It made a widespread impact across caste and class on women's consciousness. The dalit women's movement has recently revived the gender component of Ambedkar ideology, which challenged traditionalism and placed equal emphasis on the education of girls and boys. Consequently changes in sex role norms and parental attitudes have liberalised girls' access not only to school, but college and professional education among the dalit middle classes. Upper caste gender ideology about women's education and employment is also influential. In the lower classes, poor dalit parents have also displayed considerable willingness to invest in daughters' education. Many dalit families of Marathwada and Vidarbha region defied costs and poverty to send their daughters to school. The post 80's spurt in girls' educational enrolment could well be attributed to the changing climate.

However, in the final analysis, multiple macro and micro factors viz. the dominant realities of material poverty, familial ideologies and cultures of femininity and female behavior and the caste gendered nature of labour market continue to set limits on dalit girls' educational levels.

Conclusions

Through a case study of the education of dalits in Maharashtra, the paper has attempted to argue that educational inequalities must be analysed as a consequence of structural inequalities in society. The nexus of caste, class and gender is germane to the study of inequality in education. Economic, social and cultural obstacles rooted in this nexus seriously affect the educational chances of dalits. Stigmatised caste minorities exist in cultures of oppression within whom educational backwardness is localised and concentrated. Contemporary dalit education however cannot be wholly explained in caste terms. Dalits occupy a largely low position in the class structure and in the production and reproduction of

capitalist relations. Class formation has been a facilitative factor in dalit educational advance aided by liberationary ideology and movement. Predominantly however, it has served as an educational barrier. The combined impact of semi-feudal and capitalist class structure fundamentally structures educational opportunity. The analysis of the interaction between gender, caste and class has laid bare the roots of the extreme educational backwardness of dalit girls that exists in absolute and relative terms. In all, the paper suggests that contradictions in the educational situation reflect the contradictions in society and culture. Educational research needs to proceed in the direction of examining these interconnections in order to identify the causes and consequences of educational inequality.

Table 1
Enrolment Growth for General and Dalit Boys and Girls at All Levels of School Education (1979-80 – 1998-99)

Year	Std I – IV				Std V – VII				Std VIII - X			
	Total	Dalit	Boys	Girls	Total	Dalit	Boys	Girls	Total	Dalit	Boys	Girls
1979-80 Enrolment	4028635	3100255	587331	405971	1616337	981158	197262	94898	972587	461103	112224	38968
1981-82 Enrolment	4172781	3264738	602844	433176	1805105	1113597	234721	116550	1105066	532526	133743	5134
1993-94 Enrolment	4847193	4331840	745456	665527	2741627	2154683	386940	283174	1960335	1281684	275238	163071
Growth in Enrolment 1981-82 - 1993-94	674412	1067102	142612	232351	936522	1041086	152219	166624	855269	749158	141495	111957
Growth rate 1981-82 - 1993-94	16.1	32.6	23.6	53.6	51.8	93.4	64.8	142.9	77.3	40.6	105.7	218.9
1998-99 Enrolment	5679213	4685079	773884	77522	3095311	2699418	468915	402725	2304814	1758211	332191	241099
Growth rate 1993-94 - 1998-99	17.1	8.15	3.8	7.8	12.9	25.28	21.18	42.2	17.57	37.17	20.6	47.84
Overall Growth rate (1979-80 – 1998-99)	40	51	31.7	76.7	91	175.1	137.7	324.3	136.9	181.3	196.0	518.7

Source: Education at a Glance (1979-80 – 1998-99), Directorate of Education, Government of Maharashtra.

Table 2

**Stagewise Enrolment Ratios at Different Levels for Total and Dalit Population
(1978-79 – 1998-99)**

Level Year	Primary (I-V)				Middle (VI-VII)				Secondary (VIII-X)			
	General		Dalit		General		Dalit		General		Dalit	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1978-79	124.2	96.9	142.4	99.1	61.7	35.9	58.6	26.4	41.6	20.0	37.7	13.1
1981-82	122.8	98.5	140.5	102.5	64.9	39.3	66.2	31.7	41.7	20.6	40.1	15.5
1993-94	104.5	94.7	142.6	128.4	64.4	51.1	82.4	59.4	68.6	47.7	86.7	54.7
1998-99	103.9	99.7	142.2	137.4	96.4	85.8	127.0	111.0	71.6	63.3	84.6	79.7

Source: Education at a Glance (1978-79 – 1989-99), Directorate of Education, Government of Maharashtra.

Table 3

**Dalit Boys and Girls Enrolment as Percentage of Total Boys & Total Girls
Enrolment in Maharashtra (1979-80 and 1998-99)**

Year	Lower Primary		Upper Primary		Secondary		Higher Secondary	
	I-IV		V-VII		VII-IX		X-XII	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1979-80	14.54	13.09	12.20	9.67	11.54	8.45	10.87	6.19
1981-82	14.4	13.32	12.99	10.46	12.10	9.6	11.16	6.73
1993-94	15.38	15.36	14.11	13.14	14.04	12.72	13.21	10.76
1998-99	15.24	15.32	15.12	14.92	14.41	13.71	14.79	11.23

Source: Education at a Glance (1979-80 – 1998-99), Directorate of Education, Government of Maharashtra.

Table 4

Per cent Girls Enrolment to Total Enrolment and Dalit Girls Enrolment to Total Dalit Enrolment at Different Levels (1979-80 - 1998-99)

Year	Lower Primary (I - IV)		Upper Primary (V - VII)		Secondary (VIII-X)	
	Per cent Girls	Per cent Dalit Girls	Per cent Girls	Per cent Dalit Girls	Per cent Girls	Per cent Dalit Girls
1979-80	43	40	37	32	32	25
1981-82	43	41	38	33	32	27
1993-94	47	47	44	42	39	37
1998-99	41 (48)	48	46 (47)	46	43 (44)	42

Figures in Parenthesis represent per cent non dalit girls to total per cent girls.

Source: Education at a Glance (1979-80 - 1998-99), Directorate of Education, Government of Maharashtra.

Table 5

Age Specific School Attendance (Per cent) in General and Dalit Populations and Caste/Gender Disparities in Maharashtra (1991)

Age group (in years)	Attendance Rates				Percentage Difference in Attendance between			
	Dalit		General		Dalit Boys & Girls	General Girls & Boys	General Boys	General Girls
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls				
6-9	63.29	55.39	69.77	62.83	8.21	6.94	6.17	7.44
10-12	82.27	67.45	83.48	72.00	14.83	11.48	11.20	4.55
13-15	76.06	58.52	75.75	59.91	17.53	15.84	-0.30	1.38
16-17	62.42	40.84	61.46	40.97	21.58	20.49	-0.96	0.13

- sign denotes higher dalit as compared to general attendance

Source: Census, 1991

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Terms of Inclusion: Dalits and the Right to Education

by
Geetha Nambissan

Terms of Inclusion - Dalits and the Right to Education

Introduction

The decade of the 1990s has witnessed considerable efforts by the state and civil society in India to universalize elementary education. While free and compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years was written into the directive principles of state policy of the Indian constitution in 1950, it had been reduced to the level of rhetoric by the constant setting and resetting of official deadlines over the years, completely oblivious of ground realities in education. What has happened in little over a decade is a change in both the international and national scenario in relation to the priority given to education and the efforts to ensure that education is the right of every child. Internationally, conventions such as the Rights of the Child and declarations at Jomtien and Dakar, the availability of aid for education, donor pressure to achieve stated goals, and successive human development reports which highlighted India's dismal record in education, created an environment in which the Indian state was obliged to set in motion new policy initiatives and programmes to bring all children to school. There has also been a significant focus by the judiciary as well as NGOs and citizens groups in India on the right to education. More recently the corporate sector has also come forward with independent initiatives in primary education as well as in support of government programmes of UEE.

A significant emphasis in policy and programmes has thus been on hitherto educationally deprived groups such as dalits, adivasis and minorities (and girls) who comprise the majority of children who are out of school. These are children who belong to socially vulnerable groups, denied education not only because of poverty but also because of low status derived from their position in the traditional social structure in relation to caste and culture. In addition, the fact of generations of educational deprivation has also meant that these children come from non-literate or poorly schooled backgrounds that are unable to provide the necessary cognitive, language and social skills

that make for relatively greater school readiness among the more privileged classes. Thus these communities are not easily able to access schooling and when they are in a situation to do so, often do not have the economic, social and academic wherewithal to complete at least 12 years of education. Given such a scenario, what does the right to education for hitherto educationally excluded groups really mean in substantive terms? What is the magnitude of the task and what are the critical issues that need to be addressed?

In this paper I focus on the education of Dalits (Scheduled Castes) in the light of the Fundamental Right to Education. I have written on the education of dalit communities emphasizing that their caste status as former 'untouchables' is still a barrier to school entry and influences their experience of education (Nambisan, 1996). I have also highlighted the growing inter regional and intra-caste variations in school participation among dalits and the pointed to the need to address educational disparities that are quite visible within these communities (Nambisan and Sedwal, 2003). In the discussion that follows I reiterate these as issues that need to be addressed if dalit children are to realize their right to education. However I place greater emphasis on 'the institutional framework' that has come into place in the wake of policy initiatives for UEE, more specifically on the increasing stratification schools on the one hand and the setting in place of decentralized and participative structures for public participation in and academic support for education on the other. I argue that this framework has important implications for the terms of inclusion of dalit children in education. I view inclusion not merely in relation to quantitative indices of school entry, attendance and completion rates that are being presently used to assess social parity, or equality of educational opportunity as understood in policy documents. Following Kabeer (2000) I view inclusion in education as a far more complex process that positions social groups differently in relation valued resources: knowledge, skills and cultural attributes, future opportunities and life chances, sense of dignity, self worth and social respect. Kabeer's notion of 'adverse incorporation' or 'problematic inclusion' as against 'privileged inclusion', draws attention to the importance of interrogating the process of institutional inclusion of hitherto excluded groups from the perspective of equity – i.e. against criteria of social justice and fairness.

Situating the education of dalits in the context of poverty, hierarchical caste relations, and an increasingly stratified school system, I argue that while the large majority of dalit children are now being included in schools at the point of entry, the terms of their inclusion in relation to institutional structures and processes are discriminatory. However I suggest that the institutional interventions in primary elementary education also provide opportunities for enabling education among disadvantaged groups and must be explored and strengthened. I have based the discussion that follows mainly on recent research studies and surveys (i.e. of the late 1990s) so that the context in which the right to education must be realized is in focus.

Education Policy Frame and the Right to Education.

The right to education must be seen in conjunction with policy framework laid down by the state for the universalisation of elementary education. The thrust in National Policy on Education (1986) was on universal access, enrolment and retention up to 14 years of age and improvement in the quality of education to enable all children to achieve 'essential levels of learning' (NPE, 1992:18). More recently the objectives laid down for the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan are that all children will complete five years of schooling by 2007, eight years of schooling by 2010 and provision of education of quality (SSA, n.d.). The perspective in relation to educationally deprived groups has been to 'equalise educational opportunity by attending to the specific needs of those who have been denied equality so far' (NPE, 1992:9) and to 'bridge all gender and social category gaps at the elementary level' (SSA, n.d.). Thus policy objective has largely been to bring excluded groups such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes on par with the general population in terms of enrolment, retention and learning levels (attaining minimum levels of learning). The process of schooling, which is integral to the quality of the learning experience and hence equity in education has received little attention.

Institutionally the 1986 policy brought in the non-formal system of education ostensibly to meet the needs of children who could not access formal education and remained outside the school system. The NFE was closed in 1997 in response to criticism that it served as a parallel inferior stream of education. The Alternative Schools system that claims parity with regular primary schools has been put in its place. In 1994 the

DPE 2, provided a major thrust to primary education targeting children hitherto out of school and emphasizing quality of schooling, and creating district, cluster and village level structures that would facilitate decentralized planning, community participation, academic support and monitoring of education. The SSA, has also laid emphasis on 'community ownership' of the school system.

The 86th amendment to the constitution is an important step in the process of UEE as it makes education for children a fundamental right and not merely a directive principle of state policy. It has been critiqued for a number of reasons such as its narrow coverage of only the 6-14 year age group and the glossing over of concerns of quality both of which are likely to be detrimental to the schooling of marginal groups whose access to early childhood care and pre-schooling as well as quality education is far poorer than that of the middle classes/higher castes. The draft legislation makes a distinction between schools, alternative schools and transitional arrangements for education (that are especially targeted at hitherto out of school children among whom dalits predominate) and fails to provide pedagogically meaningful minimum norms for infrastructure basic facilities and teacher qualifications in alternative/proposed 'transitional' schools. It also appears to make the management, and administration of schooling more bureaucratic and duplicates authority structures at the local level. In what follows I discuss the substantive implications of the right to education for dalit children given their social and economic context, the institutional structures they engage with and their learning experiences within schools.

Dalits: Social and Economic Realities

What is the status of dalit communities in India today? While the situation of dalits from all accounts has improved and the majority no longer lives under the inhuman condition that was their lot even 50 years ago, they still occupy the lowest echelons in Indian society both economically and socially. Dalits predominate among the more marginal groups in rural areas as land poor agricultural labour, and can be found largely engaged in wage labour and menial services in urban areas. Data on poverty ratios indicate that the proportion of dalits below the poverty line (36.2 percent in rural and 38.6 percent in urban areas) was significantly higher than that of the non SC/ST population in both rural

(21.6 percent) and urban India (23.7 percent) in 1999¹. Their low social and ritual status in rural society is compounded by economic dependence on higher (and dominant) caste groups, rendering them vulnerable in the context of inter caste relations.² Scholars have observed that incidents of blatant untouchability are less visible and are now restricted mainly to the private sphere especially in urban areas. However Dalits continue to live in clusters physically segregated from other households in villages in India and is often relegated to the most inhospitable terrain of the village with poorest access to basic facilities and amenities:

The SC clusters often happen to the more difficult localities in terms of access and facilities. If it is a low-lying area without transportation in one village, it is located on a hilltop in another. This has severe implications for the daily lives of adults as well as children. They have to walk longer for fetching water, fuel wood and work, and in some cases have to remain cut-off for months together during the rains.... Further these are the last clusters to receive facilities and services which usually are brought to high caste localities. Thus SC communities are discriminated against in location of facilities and services and other benefits provided under different schemes³ (Jha and Jhingran 2002:92-93).

Dalit communities are not homogenous and they live in a wide range of social situations. The traditional social oppression of dalits is linked to their position as 'untouchables' in the caste system whereby they were prohibited from owning land and other assets and denied access to education. The nature of caste relations and how it has historically and in more recent times, influenced access to resources, opportunities, and livelihood strategies of dalits has been critical. Where dalits have been able to access alternative sources of income, they are less bound to the oppressive caste framework of

¹ The situation of Scheduled Tribes (ST) or adivasi communities is relatively worse than dalits in relation to economic conditions and education especially in rural areas. For instance around 46 percent of the adivasi population in rural areas was below the poverty line in 1999. Though dalits and adivasis are often clubbed together by in policy discourse, the specific reasons for the economic and educational backwardness in these two communities differ and they must be understood separately. I am focusing only on dalit children in this paper.

² Hirsh Mander observes that where dalits are concerned there is an 'overlap between the poverty and pollution line' (quoted in a recent seminar).

³ The introduction of State Component Plan specifically targeted at dalits made possible the provision of publicly provided facilities, targeted to the SCs in villages. If a road were built with state funds it would stop at the upper caste habitations under normal circumstances. Similar was the case with facilities for water. With SCP funds it was possible to extend these facilities to the dalit *bastis* as well. (Personal communication, Thorat).

economic and social relations. Jha and Jhingran's study indicates that non-traditional opportunities for the dalits as a result of economic changes, has meant a decline in their dependence on high caste families, 'reduction in the practice of attached labour', 'greater negotiation power with local landlords', and 'greater ability to survive and cope' (2002:96). Education has been an important channel for social mobility and dalits who had a relatively early exposure to education because of historical and social circumstances were able to benefit from the policy of reservations in the public sector in the post independence India. Adult franchise and democratic polities have facilitated social mobilization and political assertion by dalit communities in which educated youth are seen to play an important role in these movements (Pai, 2000). However only a small section of dalits have reaped the benefits of formal education and occupational opportunities that it provides access to, and the majority of dalit families 'happen to be over-represented among the poorest, the landless, the low-paying, low-skilled wage earners and illiterates, categories that signify deprivation and vulnerability' (Jha and Jhingran, 2002:83).

Participation in Schools in the 1990s: Enrolment, Attendance and Retention

School participation data from the NFHS (1998-99) for the 6-14 year age group indicates that the task of ensuring that all children in this age group are receiving education is an enormous one. As seen in table 1, by the end of the 1990s, there was still 16 percent of the 6-10 year age group and 23 percent in the 11-14 year age group not attending school. The percentage of non-attendance was higher in rural (19.3 percent) as compared to urban areas (9.7 percent), and girls as compared to boys (23.4 percent and 15.4 percent respectively in rural areas). The proportion of school going children from dalit communities had significantly increased in the 1990s. However non-attendance among dalits was higher than in the general population (around 20 percent in the 6-10 and 29 percent in the 11-14 year age group in 1998). Inter-caste disparities are of the magnitude of over 10 percentage points can be seen if attendance rates of dalits and 'other caste' children (a category that excludes Other Backward Castes) are compared (for instance 76.1 percent and 87.3 percent of children in the 6-14 year group respectively were attending schools). Inequalities on the basis of gender are pronounced and are far sharper

when attendance rates among dalit girls are compared with other caste girls even in the primary school going age group (for instance 72.3 percent and 84.2 respectively percent in rural areas) as well as other caste boys (90.5 percent in rural areas).

Intra regional variations in school attendance rates can be seen among dalit groups across the country. Primary school attendance rates range from a high of over 94 percent among dalit children in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra to a low of 76.2 percent 73.7 percent in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan respectively¹. In all these states, attendance rates of dalits compare well with that of other caste children. Comparison across age groups suggests that there have been significant gains in attendance rates among young dalit children in the 1990s. Attendance rates in the 6-10 year age group in all these states increased by more than 10 percentage points over that in the 11-14 year age group, (the largest gains being among girl children in rural areas. In Rajasthan for instance, the increase was to the tune of more than 20 percentage points) in all these states pointing to the growing demand for schooling among dalits.

While the proportion of dalit children who enter school has increased significantly in the last decade and more, successful completion of eight years of elementary education is important if education up to 14 years is to be ensured in substantive terms². The decline in school attendance rates in the older age groups is indication enough that large numbers of children leave school well before the age of 14 years. While this may be so for the child population in general, the rate of discontinuation appears far higher for dalits as compared to higher caste groups. NFHS data show that only around 50 percent of children aged 10-14 years (the broad age group factors in for late entry and stagnation) completed primary school and 42 percent have completed middle school in 1998-99 (NFHS, 2000). Dalits perform even more poorly where school completion rates are concerned, particularly in comparison with children from other castes. The proportion of dalit children who have completed primary schooling was only 43 percent (as compared to 58 percent for other castes), and middle school around 42 percent (as compared to 63

However educationally advanced states do have districts and blocks with a significant dalit population that have low literacy and enrolment rates. For instance in the state of Tamil Nadu which had an overall average female literacy rate of 64.55 percent in 2001, Dharmapuri district with a relatively large dalit population had a literacy rate of around 49 percent (Akhila R, 2004, 2618).

² The Programme of Action's (of NPE 1986), ingenious interpretation of the Constitutional provision of education for all, up to the age of 14 years was that all children would complete 5 years of schooling by the age of 14 years, rather than that they would complete 8 years of elementary education.

percent for other castes) in the respective age groups. World Bank (2003) has computed primary school completion rates of children aged 12 years and 16 years from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS, 2000). Primary school completion rates for dalits are relatively high in Kerala (96 percent as compared to 100 percent for the other castes). However the proportion of children who completed primary school is relatively low in states such as Maharashtra (79.21 percent), and particularly Tamil Nadu (41.96 percent), Rajasthan (35.15 percent) and Uttarpradesh (30.52 percent) figure at the lower end as far as completion rates for dalits are concerned, the lowest surprisingly being West Bengal with a shockingly low rate of only 19.28 percent of dalit children aged 12 years having completed primary school. Middle school completion rates for dalit children at age 16 range from a low of around 24 percent in Bihar and 31 percent in Rajasthan to 74 percent in Maharashtra, 63.89 percent in Tamil Nadu and 90.8 percent in Kerala (*ibid*). The 'caste gap' in school completion rates can be seen in all states.

There are two points of concern that emerge from the earlier discussion. Firstly a significant proportion of children continue to remain out of school. As this is so even in the younger age group, it suggests that school entry for a section of children is still a problem particularly in the educationally backward states. Secondly the relatively low school completion rates in 1999, highlights the fact that despite efforts towards EFA and UEE, gathering full steam from the early 1990s, schools were unable to retain the majority of children even till the end of the primary stage of education. That caste status is an important barrier to school completion is seen in the fact that school attendance and completion rates for dalit children are well below that of the other caste groups in most states, the magnitude of disparity varying across states. Even states that have been able to bring the majority of dalit children to school such as Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra appear to have failed to ensure school completion for a significant proportion of children pointing to the need to integrate concerns of completion of elementary schooling and quality of education with that of universal school enrolment.

Caste, Poverty and School Access

One of the continuing casualties of 'ex untouchable' caste status is easy access to schooling. Though the official position is that primary schools are available to as many as around 95 percent of the population within a kilometer of their habitation, a closer look at the available data as well as recent research suggests that lack of easy access to schools for dalit children is likely to continue to be an obstacle to their education. In many instances this follows from the segregated pattern of living in rural India where Dalit households are usually in clusters that are usually on the outskirts of the village at a distance from higher caste habitations. Schools serve not only as learning spaces but also as election offices, polling booths, and marriage houses. The politics of school location ensures that they are usually located in upper caste habitations making them not only physically distant from dalit habitations but often socially inaccessible as well. Navigating their way into upper caste habitations may prove daunting for dalit children and instances have been reported of their encountering hostility and even being barred from entering these areas⁶ (Nambisan and Sedwal, 2002). Further dalit clusters are located in the more inhospitable terrain in villages and are often vulnerable to rains/floods when many of these settlements are cut off from the main village where the school is usually located (Jha and Jhingran, 2002: 93-94).

Until the late eighties, policy efforts to increase access of dalits to schools were largely limited to relaxing of norms for the establishment of schools in predominantly dalit habitations. Thus, though the official norm was that habitations with a population of 300 and more were entitled to a primary school within a kilometer, for dalits (and tribal) this norm was relaxed to a population of 200 and more. However since dalit habitations formed part of larger villages, official distance norms were met even if schools were located within upper caste habitations, often resulting in physical but not necessarily social access for children from these communities. Data from the All India Education Survey (AIES) in 1993 showed that dalit habitations did not differ significantly from general rural habitations where access to schooling within a kilometer was concerned. Around 82-83 percent of these habitations had access to primary schools within this

⁶The politics of school location has only been hinted at in a few studies and is often mentioned in discussions by educational functionaries and social activists.

distance (NCLR, 1998). However the proportion of dalit habitations with a school (37 percent) was smaller than that was available within rural habitations in general (50 percent). Again, access is more favourable for dalits where they are in numerical strength. For instance, more than 90 percent of dalit habitations in the population slab of 2000 and more have schools. However the majority of dalit habitations are relatively small. As many as 50 percent have a population of less than 300 persons and only around 21 percent of these have primary schools within the habitation (Nambisan and Sedwal, 2002: 78).

The DPEP placed special emphasis on universal access through formal or non-formal schools⁷ equivalent to formal schools. The latter emerged as the Alternative School (AS) programme in which the problem of inadequate access to schooling received prominence. By 2001 there were more than 58,000 AS in DPEP (phase 1 and 2) states accounting for as much as 10.3 percent of the total enrolment in schools in these states⁸. The Education Guaranteed Scheme (EGS) that was initiated by the Madhya Pradesh government and specifically targeted towards 'school-less' habitations received prominence. That physical and social access was a major barrier to the schooling of dalits (and other educationally deprived groups) was clear as these communities overwhelmingly came forward to enrol their children in AS. In Madhya Pradesh, as many as 24 percent of primary school enrolments were in EGS centers that attracted a large number of dalit girls because it was also possible for them to combine schooling with their other responsibilities. Though there is every effort to project the AS programme as comparable with formal schools, it has introduced another tier within the publicly funded school system. Thus, as a consequence of the initial glossing over of the vulnerability of the education of dalits within local level caste dynamics and the politics

⁷ The non-formal education programme initiated post NPE 1986 was meant to target children who were seen as unable to avail of formal schools because they were engaged in work within and outside the home. The emphasis was on 'flexibility' and 'relevance' of schools. Around 2.79 lakh centers were sanctioned by 1995-96. There is no data on whether these centers catered to dalit children and to what effect. The only information that the AIES gives is that in 1993, NFE centers were set up in only 5.9 per cent habitations that did not have primary schools/sections within a distance of a kilometer indicating that these unlikely to have significant expanded learning opportunities for children who lacked easy access to formal schools. As mentioned, the NFE programme was wound up in 1997 in the face of sustained criticism that it was an inferior poor quality stream of education, encouraged child labour and so on.

⁸ Figures are from a World Bank review of research on DPEP 1 and 2 states (World Bank, 2003a, 31). The review cites data from Agarwal (2001).

of school location, their habitations by default, became the sites of Alternative schools that expanded access to schooling, but one that was informed by watered down norms as compared to regular government schools⁹. This will be discussed in greater detail in a later section.

Poverty and insecure livelihoods are also important factors that impinge on school enrolment and continuation in schools. Table 3 gives the distribution of school attendance by economic status or standard of living index (SLI). As can be seen, attendance rates are almost universal in households in the highest SLI (SLI-3) category. The proportion of children attending school falls in household in lower SLI. When attendance rates are compared between dalits and other castes it can be seen that in each SLI category, dalit children's school attendance rates are poorer than that of other caste children. Disparities in attendance rates in the 6-14 year age group are most pronounced among dalit (64.8 percent) and other caste children (70.2 percent) in the lowest SLI category (SLI-1) suggesting that dalit status compounds the disadvantages that the poor face in the education of their children. The interlocking of poverty, caste and gender make dalit girls among the most vulnerable in relation to schooling. Only 44.1 percent of dalit girls in the 11-14 year age group were attending schools in rural areas as compared to 55.4 percent of other caste girls and 68.2 percent of dalit boys in the same age group (See table-2).

A number of studies have suggested that poverty as a barrier in the education of the poor has been exaggerated and that there is growing demand among marginal groups for educating their children¹⁰. Parental aspirations for education for their children cited in research as well as the increasing enrolment/attendance rates recorded in national surveys have been highlighted to draw attention away from the earlier emphasised lack of demand for education to the poor quality of its supply. The latter has been highlighted as one of the primary reasons for children remaining out of school rather than the poverty of the household as reflected in the drawing upon of children's labour and the costs of schooling. More recent research suggests that poverty is likely to continue to be critical barrier to school entry and retention. In 1994 a national survey conducted by the National Council of Applied Economic Research quite clearly points to the burden of costs of

⁹ The 'transitional schools' mentioned by the Bill introduce yet another tier into the school system.

¹⁰ Bhatty (1998) highlights some of these studies.

schooling for the poorest segment of rural households among whom the annual expenditure on education was around Rs. 510 per annum (Shariff, 1999:280). Pratichi reports that in the West Bengal villages covered by their study, yearly expenses on education even among poor agricultural labour households were a minimum of around Rs. 200 per year for each child with the relatively better off families paying much more. The cost of private tuitions alone (out of reach for many among the poor) is estimated at a minimum of around Rs. 200 per child per year. Dalit, adivasi and Muslim children reportedly complained "How can we bear the expenses when we cannot even provide the children their daily meals" (Pratichi, 2000:33).

Given the incidence of poverty and high costs of schooling (the major cost being on uniforms, books and stationary) incentives such as free uniforms and books as well as mid day meals lighten the burden of expenditure for poor households. Dalit and adivasi pupils particularly girls are meant to receive a number of such incentives. However incentives have to be meaningful. This is not the case where their coverage is narrow, when they are received irregularly or when, instead of cooked meals provided daily in school, dry rations are distributed to children at infrequent intervals. Many teachers in the village studied by Pratichi felt that that "a properly administered mid-day meal scheme can have a positive impact on attendance... Mid day meal in terms of dry rations is not effective ..." (2002).

Though the formally recorded number of children who are in regular work has declined over the years, in 1993-94, they comprise a relatively larger proportion among dalit children (8.1 percent) as compared to the general child population (7.2 percent). Further as many as around 31 percent of dalit children (35 percent of dalit girls) in rural areas are engaged in domestic chores (NSSO, 1997). Jha and Jhingran's research in villages, where there was a significant proportion of dalits, shows that children's work comprises an important survival strategy of poor dalit households. In addition to household tasks, children were often engaged as contract domestic servants and cattle herds with local landlords. They make the important point that where there are rigid caste hierarchies and feudal relations and inadequate work opportunities for adults, children are drawn quite early on into the world of work (2002: 99-101). The Pratichi study found more non-school going male children from poor families engaged in income earning

activities. Tending cattle, hiring out labour as *bagal* are among the activities that child workers engage in. Teachers reported that, "If they hire out labour as *bagal* they can earn at least their own food and sometimes they can help out the family by contributing some money" (Pratichi, 2002:49). The report also cites the case of a girl who had completed class 4 and was good in her studies but had to be pulled out of school since her father can neither provide private tuition (which, he believes, is essential for studying), nor could he arrange money for books and other stationery needed. "It is difficult enough to provide a square meal", he says. Thus Mumji has joined her mother in agricultural wage work during the cultivation seasons" (Pratichi, 2002:51).

As mentioned, migration forms an important component of livelihood strategies of poor households and brings with it possibilities of income, reduces dependence on higher castes for work in villages of origin and so on. However there are important consequences for children's right to education. Often parents migrate with their children who at an early age are entrusted with family responsibilities and in time also work alongside adult family members. Some of the case studies indicate that parents are quite helpless when it comes to the education of their children. The Pratichi study cites the case of a Bauri (dalit) family that was forced to migrate in search of agricultural wage work. The eldest daughter was never enrolled in school but was entrusted with the task of caring for the younger children till she was in a position to hire out her own labour. When asked if she wanted to go to school the 15 year old child said 'Give me money and I will go to study. First we need to fill our bellies' (2002:48). Though parents often acknowledge the value of education they tend to rationalize the non enrolment of their children by suggesting that while education was important it was not relevant for their children and further that they were not in a position to see that their children were enrolled and attended school (Jha and Jhingran, 2002).

For dalits, migration to urban areas and urban residence has historically provided a relief from the oppressive regime of caste relations and also better opportunities for education and alternative occupations for their children. Relatively early migration to urban areas was one of the factors that gave some dalit communities (for instance the Mahars of Maharashtra) a head start in accessing educational and occupational opportunities in the colonial period and subsequently from independent India's policy of

affirmative action for dalits. However with rapid and unplanned urbanization and migration of the rural poor to the cities in search of employment, an increasingly large proportion of the urban population today resides in slums and shanty towns characterized by non availability of basic amenities, insecure lives and livelihoods and inadequate facilities for education and health care. NIAS (2002) cites evidence from a recent survey of 279 slums of Jaipur city that indicates that as many as 71 percent families were SC who were engaged in menial jobs. The study also reveals that though these slums (279 in Jaipur) are home to as many as 30 percent of the population of the city, they are poorly provided with facilities for education – as many as 73.48 per cent of slums do not have any government schools and 37.28 percent do not have any provision for schooling. Further that 'more than 20 percent of children in about 86% of the *bastis* do not attend any school' NIAS (2002: 16).

Research on poverty and education thus suggests the need to make a distinction between the value (in terms of aspirations and preferences) for education among poor parents, their decision to invest in the child's education, enrolment of children in school and actually ensuring regularity of their attendance. Livelihood strategies, the weighing of costs and benefits of educating each child as well as the support received for their schooling powerfully affect the nature of school participation of children. While enrolment rates (including what NSSO calls 'attendance rates') may be high, they are meaningful only when children regularly attend school. Among marginal groups enrolment drives are often common and teachers are expected to go to the homes of children and enter their names in the school register. However there is little attention to whether children go to school on a regular basis. Jha and Jhingran's study is significant in that it is one of the few attempts to make a distinction between enrolment in school and regularity of school attendance. This is especially important where children are first generation learners and their families are unable to provide the academic support that schools expect from them. In the villages that the authors studied, there was invariably a gap between the proportion of children enrolled and those who attended schools regularly. Wide variations in the regularity of school attendance of dalit children were also seen across states. For instance in Maharashtra and Karnataka, 'more than 90 % of

activities. Tending cattle, hiring out labour as *bagal* are among the activities that child workers engage in. Teachers reported that, "If they hire out labour as *bagal* they can earn at least their own food and sometimes they can help out the family by contributing some money" (Pratichi, 2002:19). The report also cites the case of a girl who had completed class 4 and was good in her studies but had to be pulled out of school 'since her father can neither provide private tuition (which, he believes, is essential for studying), nor could he arrange money for books and other stationery needed. "It is difficult enough to provide a square meal", he says. Thus Munni has joined her mother in agricultural wage work during the cultivation seasons' (Pratichi, 2002:51).

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enrolled dalit children regularly attend school. At the other end in villages in UP and Bihar, barely 20 to 25% of dalit children attend school regularly" (2002:83).

A number of factors appear to influence the regularity of school attendance. For instance the physical locale and climatic conditions can affect how often children attended school. Because the habitations in which dalit children live are more likely to be unfavourably located, they are particularly affected by such factors. Jha and Jhingran observe that where dalit settlements are in low lying areas, heavy rains can prevent children from attending school. In one case mentioned by them, the entire hamlet was cut off for almost three months in the rainy season¹¹. Physical quality of the school also influences children's attendance. In my own study of a few schools catering to poor households in Calcutta, teachers mentioned that children were keen on attending schools even during the monsoons as their home became damp and uncomfortable and they could not play out side during the rains (2003:31). On the other hand the SSKs (AS in rural West Bengal), which were easily accessible to children, constrained attendance because of their poor physical quality. One Sahayika (AS teacher) complained: 'Parents don't send little children as they have to sit in the mud' (Pratichi, 2002:87).

The nature of livelihoods of poor household also constrains regular attendance. For instance where both parents are engaged in wage labour, adult responsibilities devolve on young children who are expected to stay at home to look after younger siblings, care for domestic animals and shoulder other household responsibilities. Children are also expected to help out with farm work. One of the primary teachers spoken with in the Pratichi study said:

'You are seeing some children in the school now. If you come during the cultivation season you may see almost zero attendance from the SC and ST children. They all take some household responsibilities while the parents are out to work. And the girl children of these communities seldom attend school as they do various kinds of work both domestic and income generating. A 10 year old girl picks dry cow dung to sell, for example' (Pratichi, 2002:60)

¹¹ The attitudes of teachers, their treatment of children and so on were also factors that impinged on the attendance of children in schools and these will be discussed in relation to the quality of schooling that these children receive.

Migration of families also results in absence from school and leads to a situation where children may not be re-enrolled when they return and even if they are they are unlikely to be able to adequately cope with their studies. Other reasons that have been given for irregular attendance of children include the ill health of family members and 'lack of interest' of parents in education of their children. Ill health of family members in fact comprised 19 percent of reasons for children's absence, the largest single reason cited by parents interviewed in the Pratichi study (Pratichi, 2002:61). Parental perception of lack of relevance of schooling in situations of poverty and migration has been referred to. This is likely to be compounded where parents and elders are non-literate or have low levels of education. NFHS (2000) for instance shows sharp inter-group disparities in educational attainment of the adult population. Only around 23 percent of dalits as compared with 47 percent from other castes in the 20-29 year age group (that comprises a large number of young parents) had completed high school. This reflects starkly the effects of exclusion from education of generations of dalits and makes for unequal learning environments offered to children by the home and the community. Thus the mention of children's 'own agency', whereby they 'vote with their feet' where school attendance is concerned: playing truant from school, refusing to go to school, wanting stay home to help parents and so on must be seen in the context of their family and community contexts where the value and wherewithal for education may be not adequate for sustained schooling. In this context the role of the school in providing an inclusive learning space that is sustainable for groups hitherto excluded from education must not be glossed over. What then is the experience of the dalit child who is enrolled in school often under extremely difficult conditions?

The Quality of Schooling: Dalit Identity and the Experience of Education

Poor infrastructure, lack of basic amenities and facilities as well as inadequate number of teachers is a feature of schools that dalit children encounter as they enter government (local body managed) schools. In addition curriculum transactions in schools

is dominated by conventional pedagogy, based on the text book, 'chalk and talk' and absence of relevant teaching aids and dominated by as rote learning. On going academic support, monitoring and feed back is also not a feature of primary schools, less so in more and backward rural areas and poverty zones in the cities. This provides an unattractive learning environment for the dalit children (the majority of whom enter the government schools) and contrasts with the quality of schooling (in 'public' private institutions) availed of by the more privileged strata¹².

Many of the studies that referred to the experiences of dalit students as well as adult reminiscences reported prior to the 1980s spoke of the discrimination they faced in schools at the hands of teachers. More recent research suggests that dalit identity continues to influence the treatment of children in schools. Studies have shown that teachers (who are predominantly higher/upper caste) bring their own commonsense understanding of the legitimacy of caste relations into the classroom and that these pervade their interaction with dalit and lower caste children and is reflected in discriminatory attitudes and practices within school. Researchers report the often demeaning and harsh treatment of dalit pupils. Thus for instance, a recent study of schools, many in predominant dalit localities says, 'The most uniform finding of this research project has been the widespread nature of verbal abuse that dalit and adivasi children suffer at the hands of their upper-caste teachers in primary schools, which has a critical impact on the ways in which these first generation school attendees view themselves as learners...' (Balagopal and Subrahmanian, 2003:43). Jha Jhingran's research also points out that dalit children are "unnecessarily beaten, abused and harassed by upper caste teachers" (2002:95).

Teachers expect children from dalit and lower caste children to 'do a number of personal tasks such as fetching firewood and if the children did not oblige, physical punishment is meted out to them' (Jha and Jhingran, 2002: 95). There are also instances reported of lower caste children being assigned menial tasks such as sweeping and cleaning of the classroom (Ramachandran, 2002). Teachers are also reported to have low expectations of dalit children and fail to give them adequate attention. Exclusion of

¹² There is a small dalit middle class comprising mainly those who have availed of public sector employment that accesses 'quality' schooling for its children

children from classroom activities and making them sit in the last row is also reported (Jha and Jhingran, 2002:95). Equally serious is the observation that teachers tend to absent themselves more frequently if the pupils are mainly from disadvantaged communities. For instance it has been observed that in cases 'where all children belong to Dalit or other disadvantaged communities it is common for teachers to absent themselves or come for fewer hours' (ibid). The Pratichi study of schools in villages in West Bengal makes a mention of 'disturbing evidence that primary school teachers often show much less regard for the interests of children from poorer and lower caste backgrounds'. For instance it was observed that there was 'much greater teacher absenteeism in schools with a majority of children from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes (75 percent), compared with other schools' (33 percent). Also, in some schools with children from 'lowly families, the teachers, on a regular basis, do not take classes on certain days of the week' in one case, 'no classes on Saturdays and Mondays), and sometimes the hours are arbitrarily reduced.. ' (Sen 2002: 6).

Teachers also view parents of first generation learners with middle class frames expecting them to provide the academic support and orientation to school that the latter give their children. When children arrive in school without their clothes and books in order and homework incomplete they receive punishment (often corporal) rather than concern from teachers for the difficult conditions under which they avail of education. Sridhar underscores the inability of non literate parents to help with their children's studies or even provide them with the space to concentrate on their schoolwork. He says 'the importance of homework in the traditional primary schools is a major reason that dalit children lag behind other children in class' (1999:14). NIAS observes that most teachers do not empathise with parents' working and living conditions and do not understand the limitations faced by children who are first generation learners' (NIAS, 2002). In fact the Pratichi study says that one of the reasons why even poor parents seek private tutoring for their children is to see that the child is able to complete her homework, something that non literate and poorly educated parents are unable to do. Studies rarely mention efforts by teachers to provide any additional inputs to first generation learners. Balagopal and Subrahmanian observe that their research recorded little effort, if any, on the part of these teachers to make classroom learning for these first-

generation learners more interesting. They continued to teach through traditional methods and their inordinate reliance on homework contributed to these children (particularly in the adivasi villages) where the children's home language is different from the medium of instruction) being unable to keep up with classroom learning and therefore remaining quiet and unresponsive in class'. Many teachers appeared to be disapproving of incentives being given to children from these communities and often passed disparaging remarks about dalit parents 'being more interested in the monthly grain installments that they received and the scholarships that their children brought home rather than in their children's academic performance' (Balagopal and Subrahmanian, 2003:52).

Though the poor financial condition of household is cited by parents as the major reason for absenteeism and drop-out of children from school, teachers' absence, hostile environment and lack of children's interest in what is taught are also mentioned by them as reasons for children not attending school (Pratichi, 2002: 30). Parents from dalit (and adivasi) communities in the villages studied by Pratichi complained of the 'step-motherly' treatment that their children received in primary schools. They felt that discontinuation was 'precipitated by the poor quality of teaching, excessive punishment and children's failure in qualifying for higher classes'... (ibid: 32).

Where peer relations are concerned research reports mixed findings. In the mid 1970s, Chitnis (1975) observes that for majority of high school dalit children surveyed, friendships were confined to members of their own sub-caste or those that were closer to them in terms of ritual status. More recent studies suggest that there may be greater interaction across caste within schools but this may not extend outside the boundaries of the institution, particularly to the private space of the home (Action Aid). This is likely to be more common in towns and cities than in the villages. Balagopal and Subrahmanian refer to friendships formed among children across caste in the primary school/section they studied in Ganganagar and Ujjain town. However it must be remembered that these schools were dominated by low ranked castes. Their comment that 'within the classroom, these peer friendships were important resources that enabled students to cope with abuse or victimization by teachers', is significant and needs to be explored. Drawing attention to a different context, Jha and Jhingran report that in the economically more backward villages where rigid social hierarchies persist, dalits do indeed face hostile peer

behaviour in schools and that 'children belonging to the upper castes generally bully them and do not allow them to mix as equals'. They go on to conclude that 'the general experience of Dalit children in school, therefore, is that of neglect and indifference, when not outright discrimination and rejection' (2002:5).

Stratification, Segregation and Equity

The reference to unequal treatment of dalits within school in a few studies may be seen as mere instances and as aberrations rather than integral to the experience of formal education of children from these communities in school. However when placed within the larger context of the institutional stratification and social segregation that is increasingly visible in elementary education in India, it appears that despite being 'included' in schools in significant numbers in recent years (which project a semblance of equality of opportunity), the terms of inclusion of dalit children are inequitable when judged against criteria of fairness or justice.

The entry of large numbers of dalit and other socially and economically marginal groups into the school system, often the first generation to receive formal education, has also witnessed second and third generations learners of other social groups moving out of publicly funded schools and into private institutions (Ramachandran, 2002). Government (local body managed) primary schools increasingly cater mainly to low ranked castes (and lower classes). For instance NIAS shows that in Thanjavur, children mainly from scheduled castes (*Thoti, Parayol, Pillai* and *Chakkars*) and a sprinkling from the Most Backward Castes (such as *Oonam*) attend the local municipal primary school (2002:13). Some scholars have argued that movement of the middle (and lower middle classes) away from government schools to privately managed institutions is likely to result in greater equity as public resources can then be used for the most needy. However the flight of the middle class, the voice, and opinion making section of society results in a social fragmentation of the community of parents who access schooling. Those who remain in government schools lack voice to ensure that they receive quality of the service, setting in a process of further decline in the quality of education on offer. Further, the neglect of elementary education over the post-independent decades and the urgency to realize targets for UEE in the 1990s amidst economic restructuring has

resulted in spreading thin, the inadequate resources allocated to this sector. This is reflected in poor physical quality of schools and availability of teachers as mentioned earlier. The situation is likely to change for the worse than the better to the detriment of children from hitherto educationally deprived groups who are increasingly attending these schools. NIAS describes the decline of the municipal school in Tanjavur town, considered a model school in the early 20th century when it was catering to Brahmins and upper caste families. The 'deterioration of the school' over the decades is reflected in its 'sporadic functioning' with 'high teacher absenteeism' and decline in strength of students. NIAS observes 'Far from being a model school, it is now in a state of decay with few of the neighbourhood children attending it and with only the very poor enrolling their children in it'. In 2002 only children from dalit and lower castes remained in the school, and that too primarily because they could not afford to send their children to privately managed schools that had sprung up in the city over the years and which were catering to the demand for quality education from the higher castes. The NIAS report makes the following important point:

'As middle-class and better-educated and professional parents withdraw their children from government schools, the accountability of teachers and the pressure on them to teach or perform their other duties in school, decreases. As working-class parents, especially the labouring poor, cannot wield authority and exert pressure like the educated and professional parents, they and their children are seen as liabilities and dependent recipients who are unworthy of being educated. Further, such differentiation has other implications for the children's experience of schooling, the authority and rights of teachers, and the larger purpose of education' (NIAS, 2002:24)

The poor physical quality of local body managed (government) schools, lack of relevant aids and inadequate resources is likely to provide a work environment that in itself is unlikely to elicit and sustain teacher motivation. However it is also important to remember that schoolteachers at the elementary stage are overwhelmingly from non-dalit backgrounds, largely higher caste and middle class while their pupils as mentioned, are from low ranked castes that are also poor¹³. The growing chasm between teachers and

¹³ In 1993, dalits comprised around 11 percent of primary school teachers, 9 percent of upper primary and 5-6 percent of teachers in secondary/high schools (NCERT, 1999).

children in terms of social class or economic and educational backgrounds is often seen to underlie negative teacher attitudes to poor students and their disparaging comments on the absence of parental support for education (Sen, 2002). What is also significant is that higher caste teachers may also resent the crowding of dalit children into 'institutional space' that was hitherto taboo for 'polluted' castes and see this as a transgression of traditional social hierarchies. Balagopal and Subrahmanian view 'the abuse (of dalits) as a manifestation of a more systemic disjuncture associated with the entry of traditionally excluded groups into spaces that were hitherto the preserve of caste and class elites' (2002:43).

In keeping with the changing times, teachers as reported in many instances, may not directly speak disparagingly of 'caste status' and 'pollution' but use the more acceptable 'secular' discourse of 'ability' and 'merit' to relegate lower caste and dalit children as 'uneducable'. Velaskar for instance observes that 'The stigmatized identity (of dalits) is carried forward but is now attributed with new criteria, new labels and new disabilities and is now justified not on traditional, religious criteria, but "modern", "objective", "secular" ones of merit, excellence and fairplay' (1998:227). It is also commonplace for teachers to point to 'non conducive family environments' from as responsible for failure and drop-out of children from poor and marginal groups (Nambissan, 2003:33-34). Balagopal and Subrahmanian observe that teachers in their study 'seldom said that the child was intrinsically unable to study but described the difficulties involved in teaching them in language that blamed parents for their lack of interest, their "drunkenness", their failure to create a more conducive "home" environment and their continued reliance on traditional occupations' (B and S, 2003, 49).

The social segregation in government schools presents a diversity that has to be handled in pedagogic terms for which teachers are neither trained for nor oriented to. Children are often first generation learners, of different age groups (as they come to school as a result of mobilization and enrolment drives), drop-out from different grades, child workers, former child workers and children with special needs and so on. In terms of language and ways of living the cultural backgrounds children come from are likely to vary not only vis-à-vis the teacher but also among themselves. The educational needs of these children are unlikely to be met by the home and there is little evidence that they are

addressed in school. Conventional teacher training is yet to acknowledge the need for pedagogy that is informed by social and economic realities that these children have experienced. Curricular transaction is hence largely informed by teachers' beliefs about children's abilities that usually stem from commonsense notions and stereotypical attitudes about these social groups. NIAS (2002) observes that the belief in the lack of ability in dalit and marginal groups provides government school teachers an excuse to justify the lax and indifferent manner in which they discharge their duties: 'By associating capability and orientation of students to their background many teachers shirk their responsibility of ensuring that children gain from being in the class. In their assessment of students, many teachers mark some students as being educable and many as not educable. Such an orientation largely accounts for why many teachers do not seek to expend much time or energy on teaching...' (NIAS, 2002:29). Alternatively it may encourage corporal punishment often seen as the only way to make some children learn. The NIAS study quotes a headmaster of a municipal school justifying corporal punishment by saying 'these children do not respond to kindness. They have to be beaten to discipline them'; a master says 'Just as bullocks need to be whipped to make them pull the cart, so must these students be whipped to get them to start studying' (2002,15).

The perception of dalits as 'polluted' and 'backward' is likely to have deleterious implications for their sense of dignity, identity and self-worth. Children's own experiences within the classroom have hardly received any attention. However there are reflections of dalit adults about being made to feel 'inferior' and 'different' from their classmates in school and excluded from classroom activities (Nambisan, 1996). Krishna Kumar also draws attention to the fact that identity as 'dalit' or 'adivasi' influences engagement with school knowledge and the transaction of the curriculum to the detriment of children from these communities (1989). Illaiah points to the alienation of dalit and lower caste children from the knowledge, cultural experiences as well as the medium of communication considered legitimate for schooling (1996).

Mention has already been made of the institutionalization of Alternative Schools as introducing another albeit inferior tier within publicly provided primary schooling. AS by targeting dalit and tribal habitations in rural areas and poverty zones in some cities,

has further increased social segregation within government schools¹⁴. AS teachers are locally recruited, and are accountable to the community to which their pupils belong. Thus absenteeism is seen to be lower and social relations within the classroom less hierarchical in Alternative Schools as compared to regular primary schools. Researchers who see functioning AS (where teachers come to school) amidst the dysfunctional regular primary schools tend to be ecstatic about the former without looking at how equitable such schooling really is. What is usually ignored is that the norms that underlie this tier of schooling in relation to physical infrastructure (no minimal norms exist), teacher recruitment (on contract and at lower salaries than regular teachers) and qualifications and training (a minimum of high school with barely 3 to 20 days of training) may ensure teacher 'presence' but set limits to the quality of education that children receive. Thus though schools are said to be 'functioning' this is mainly in terms of regularity of teacher attendance and taking of lessons while the quality of classroom instruction is likely to be poor. An earlier study did draw attention to the poor quality of education being imparted in 'para teacher' schools (DPEP, 1999). Pratichi emphasises that one of the major constraints within which SSKs function is that of poor facilities as compared to regular schools: 'The situation in the SSKs is much worse only 24% of them have got small, single-room buildings. The rest conduct classes in cowsheds, verandahs and in community rooms'. Further AS children who are from deprived socially and economically disadvantaged groups are not entitled to incentives such as free textbooks, mid day meals and so on (Pratichi, 2002, 32).

Available research suggests that the performance of dalit children has been relatively poor. DPEP base line studies carried out in 1993 showed that dalit (and adivasi) children 'performed less well than other students in tests of language and Mathematics' (World Bank, 1997:133). Further that 'when family background characteristics are statistically controlled for, the difference in average achievement in maths and language between 'other student' and dalit and tribal students decline in the 8 states studied. (ibid: 133). The conclusion that 'difference in average achievement

¹⁴ There may also be a movement of dalits from regular schools to AS located in their own habitations. For instance regular higher caste school teachers may deliberately direct dalits to attend their *own* schools (as reported by a researcher: Subrahmanyam, personal communication). There are also reports that a functioning AS school is likely to draw dalit and lower caste children from regular schools.

between scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students and other students are attributable largely to differences in socio-economic status', gives the schools children attend hardly anything to cheer about. The review of the performance in schools in DPEP states in 2002 suggests that while there has been progress made by dalit children in relation to learning outcomes, a large proportion have failed to achieve the minimum targeted 40 percent in language and maths. This is more pronounced in the senior grades in primary school (World Bank, 2003)¹⁵.

Dysfunctional Schools and Private Options

Given the poorly functioning government school sector, it is not surprising that parents of dalit children are looking to the private sector for good quality education for their children. The NCAER data shows that in 1994 around 30 percent of dalit children (aged 6-14 years) were enrolled in privately managed schools (aided and unaided) in rural areas. In urban areas the shift to private schools is more significant though less than in the general population. Between 1986 and 1993 as much 31 percent of the increase in primary school enrolment of dalit boys in urban areas was in privately managed unaided schools (NCERT, 1998). Dalit parents tend to see private schools as having quality education on offer as compared to what their children receive in government schools. As mentioned earlier in the NIAS study on Tanjavur, dalit parents were keeping their children in the municipal school only because they could not afford to put them in private schools in the city. In Balagopal and Subrahmanian study in Ujjain city, only a few *Kalmikis* (low ranked dalit sub castes) were sending their children to private schools. However there was a belief that 'academic mobility' came with private schooling, and the

¹⁵ There are programmes today that seek to 'guarantee' learning, bring in accelerated learning and so on. The Learning Guarantee Programme of the Premji Foundation attempts to provide incentives (monetary benefits as well recognition) to schools in the educationally backward district of Karnataka in order that schools attain expected levels of achievement. This programme has received the support of the government of Karnataka. While a large number of schools appear to have supported this programme, external incentive driven programmes are likely to make them focus largely on 'results' rather than process or quality of learning. Such an emphasis on 'outcomes' may have implications for the education of first generation learners as they may be seen as 'liabilities' in such programmes - likely to bring down performance levels of individual schools. On the other hand these children need enabling learning conditions for them to attend school regularly and perform well. Whether programmes that exhort schools to show measurable outcomes within a short period of time provide the space required to focus on processes of schooling that include the culture of the classroom and the response of teachers particularly toward educational and social deprivation needs attention.

'entire community had not only imbibe the culturally hegemonic language around the failure of government schools but used this to criticize the lack of academic rigour in the local Lower Primary School' (2003:46). Speaking of the local school, they make the significant observation that the *Valmikis* construct this school only as a temporary space for their children, until they could put them into 'private school' (ibid:48).

Within private schooling as well, a number of tiers have emerged in relation to management and quality of education on offer. In addition to the officially 'recognized' private managed aided and unaided schools are the 'unrecognised' schools that do not come under the purview of government norms and regulations. Such schools are mushrooming in cities and small towns as well as in the more developed villages where there is a demand for quality education seen as that which is privately provided and in the medium of English. These schools also flourish because the state usually turns a blind eye to private schools at the primary stage while regulations come into force at the secondary level. It is to these primary schools that sections of the poor and lower middle class turn to in order to improve the life chances of their children. In Jaipur a study notes that as many as 4000 small primary schools were catering to the demand for private schooling among the lower middle classes. Many of them were located within or near the poverty zones in the city (cited in NIAS, 2002). Many dalits enroll their children in such unregulated schools. Though there has been no research attention to quality of private schooling that dalits avail of, scattered references in some studies suggest that they are likely to be shortchange in relation to quality education within the private sector as well. There are implications for gender equity, as parents attempt to secure what they see as 'private', good quality education for their sons while sending their daughters to government/municipal schools. This trend is now reflected among the relatively better off dalits who are also accessing private education for their children. According to the NIAS study, 'when parents can afford it they send their son to the private and daughter to the corporation school' (2002:15). The increasing public-private divide in schools according to gender has been reported in a number of studies. Manjarekar points to the hitherto unexplored detrimental consequences for self-esteem as daughters continue to be sent to government while their brothers access privately provided schools (2003).

Dysfunctional schools also force parents to seek private tutoring for their children. The poor quality of education offered by the public school system is one of the main reasons for the flourishing tuition industry that today caters even to the poor. West Bengal is probably the state where private 'coaching' is most rampant. Families in the Pratichi study saw private tuition as an important input in school education. A fifth of children whose parents were agricultural labourers (mostly dalits and adivasis) were sending their children for private tuition. The accessing of private tuition by the poor not only increases the burden of cost of primary education, it also differentiates them on the basis of those who can provide this extra academic support for their children and those who cannot (Pratichi, 2002: 32-33). As mentioned, private tuition is seen as important not only in relation to what is taught in class but for the completion of homework as well, which if not done, bring the wrath of the teachers upon children.

Institutions and Opportunities

A significant feature of the education system at the primary stage today is the institutional space for participation of local communities in the affairs of the schools and academic support for teachers. An important thrust of the DPEP was on setting up village and school level committees to enable participation in school education and to create Block and Cluster resource centers (BRC and CRC) to provide on going academic support to teachers in local schools and organizing trainings for the professional development of teachers. I would like to argue that though studies do indicate that structural constraints impede the effective functioning of these institutional interventions to a great extent, there is also evidence to believe that they offer possibilities for providing enabling conditions for the education of marginal groups, in this case dalits.

Village Education Committees are formal structures envisaged to mobilize local communities to send their children to school as well participate in its functioning. Around 2.3 lakh Village Education Committees (VEC) 1.7 lakh Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) /Mother Teacher Associations and 61,000 School Management Development Committees have been put in place (World Bank, 2003). These committees provide for representation of dalits, adivasis and women. Have dalits been able to participate in VECs and thereby strengthened their voice in relation to the functioning of schools? The

World Bank review of research (2003), suggests that in general the functioning of VECs has been irregular. The Pradhan report observes that while VECs may have been formed in a number of villages, many are still to become functional (2003). Subrahmanian notes that VEC activities have mainly centred around construction, maintenance and expansion of school buildings and that there was less focus on 'mobilizing participation and assessing what factors outside the physical availability of schooling hamper or facilitate greater school enrolment' (2003:234). The 'limited empowerment of its members especially from SC/ST communities and women' and their 'silent' and 'passive' attendance at meetings has also been commented upon (World Bank 2003 a). Given the marginal status of these communities in the village, reports of the exclusion of their educational needs from the VEC concerns are not surprising. For instance a study in 22 villages in Karnataka mentions that 'even micro-planning, identifying the status of non-enrolled students in the village is often not inclusive of the SC/ST communities' (*ibid*). Another reports that the finding from a micro planning strategy that a section of the village wanted non formal schools in the evening for children was summarily dismissed without addressing the larger concern of why children were not able to attend regular schools and initiating efforts to see that it was possible for them to do so (Subrahmanian, 2003:231). In addition to caste and gender hierarchies, an impediment to the regular participation of dalit members in the VEC was their dependence on wage labour where in they had to often migrate out of the village. Teachers and higher caste members were found to play an important role in decision-making and often sought the involvement of the more marginal groups mainly where there was need for mobilization of labour and resources (*ibid*).

The importance of local level organizations for enabling schooling of children especially girls is drawn attention to by NIAS (2002) It was found that membership of organizations (Ambedkar Sangh, Mahila Sangh, Church organizations) had provided poor parents 'support and encouragement for sending children to school' (2002:14). Women's groups at the local level have in some instances also played a significant role in enhancing school participation and functioning in some states. There are also reports of school level committees that have been able to intervene in the functioning of schools. Jha and Jhingran emphasise the importance of social mobilization and political assertion

in claiming the right to education. In villages where there have been histories of dalit movements, parents were seen to be relatively more critical of school functioning and likely to be more active in VFC. 'In course of time, the schooling of children becomes a norm at such places and every child is sent to school' (2003:28)¹⁶. However poor parents have no control over the quality of classroom transactions and social relations within the classroom and are likely to continue to witness, drop out, failure and poor school completion rates unless some attention is directed to academic support to teachers and their professional development.

Block and Cluster resource centres, are an important institutional innovation to provide ongoing academic support to teachers within primary schools, monitor the quality of classroom instruction and address constraints in subject knowledge and appropriate pedagogy that teachers face in the daily routine of curriculum transaction. There were at least around 800 BRCs and over 5000 CRCs in the 272 DPEP districts by 2000¹⁷. A couple of evaluations do mention visits by CRC coordinators to schools, and developing of teacher skills. However in the light of the discussion so far it would be important to look at the role of BRC and CRCs from the perspective of the specific needs and constraints of dalit and marginal groups. As mentioned, dalit children who mainly look outside the home for academic support are likely to draw a blank when face to face with teachers, whose professional capacities are poorly developed and who are neither oriented nor sensitized to the realities of poverty and social discrimination in the lives of children. Nor are they adequately trained to address the learning needs of their pupils within the classroom. Thus while there are reports of the occasional teacher/principal who disapproves of discriminatory practices towards pupils from low ranked castes, and reaches out to them, there is need for a systemic response to these issues. Academic support structures that have been put in place across the country and are meant to cater

¹⁶ Subrahmanian suggests that while VFCs attempt to officially sponsor community mobilization, their effectiveness depends upon a number of social and political factors in addition to histories of popular mobilizations in different contexts. In one of the villages in Karnataka that she studied, Subrahmanian found that, though a committed head master was able to use his influence and see that school facilities were brought close to dalit habitations, the mobilization of parents and providing support to send their children to school did not follow. This was reflected in relatively low school enrolment rates. Lack of occupational opportunities within the village constrained the participation of dalit members in the VFC (2003).

¹⁷ These are figures of the number of resource centers that were constructed by 2000 (World Bank, 2003a).

specifically to local body managed primary schools where children from hitherto educationally deprived groups predominate provide an opportunity to seriously address issues of quality of schooling for these children.

The professional development of teachers was one of the objectives of the DPEP and a fairly large number of teachers had received in-service training as part of the programme by 2000 (World Bank, 2003). However the actual trainings were too brief (barely 3-20 days) neither to address subject content, nor to build capacities to provide the academic support that first generation learners urgently require. Nor were these crucial aspects of training seriously thought through in relation to diverse teaching and learning contexts. Further, training appears to have completely ignored the issue of caste based social discrimination within schools and how to question mindsets on these issues. Other than reference to Karnataka state that had developed 'video material on teachers' sensitivity to students from SC and ST communities', training modules appeared to be silent on this issue (World Bank, 2003:34). Batra makes the important point that 'teacher perceptions of dalit children, as backward with poor learning capacities, continue to be viewed within the narrow domain of building positive attitudes and motivating teachers through in-service training. Teacher education needs to engage teachers with the subject of their belief systems and assumptions about children and how these bear upon classroom processes to reinforce marginalisation even where structural opportunities of access to schooling exist'¹⁸.

It is important to also bear in mind that it was during this period (as part of the larger neo-liberal ideology that was influencing policy) that there was a policy shift towards dilution of norms of teacher recruitment (in terms of basic qualifications and pre-service training) and hiring of teachers on contract. Teachers on contract are being hired not only in AS but against teacher vacancies in regular schools in many states. The neglect of pre-service teacher education, a cavalier attitude to in-service training and lack of attention to subject competencies, pedagogy and the social context of schooling as well as the hiring of teachers on contract has led to the trivializing of the much needed thrust to professional development of teachers. There is a sphere that needs reflection informed by a perspective of providing education of equitable quality.

¹⁸ Batra, Poonam (personal communication).

The framework of educational governance which today calls for greater decentralized planning, and management of schools requires qualitatively different roles that educational administrators, lower level officials and academic resource personnel are expected to play. In addition to specific capacities that local level planning, monitoring, school mapping, resource support and so on require educational functionaries have to be oriented to reaching out to marginal communities that may differ greatly from them in terms of social background, power and authority. As has been said, the administration has hitherto mainly been a carry over from the colonial period, largely oriented to the maintenance of law and order rather than facilitating development. Unless administrators are adequately oriented and obliged to do so they are unlikely to bridge the social gap that they confront while carrying out their duties. Further, unless educational functionaries and teachers (who are often asked to play the role of petty administrators¹⁹), are informed by a rights perspective and view themselves as 'educational professionals' rather than seeing themselves as moral change agents and dispensers of patronage, they are unlikely bring to their work the seriousness, commitment and sensitivity that is essential.

Vasavi emphasizes the absence of 'education institution building' by the state resulting in the publicly funded school becoming 'marginal institutions'. On the one hand, she points to the failure to set in place organizational structures (VECs, PTAs etc) and build their capacities to make them effective, and on the other to bureaucratization and centralization of decision making 'replicated at every level with the concomitant loss of meaning and orientation', 'the absence of a culture of democracy and professionalism' and the subsequent indifference of educational administrators down the line to their work (2004:31). This is an extremely important because not only does it highlight the neglect of educational institutions by the state, but it also draws attention to nature of institutions themselves as social arrangements governed by norms, values and rules that 'define membership, access to resources and modes of participation and 'work cultures'.

In the context of 'institutional building', it may be appropriate to revisit the Kothari Commission for the insights it offers for the development of equitable education in

¹⁹ Teachers are called to play an 'extra-academic roles' such as carrying out census and other surveys, conducting elections and so on. They are often given petty administrative tasks at the block office. They also distribute text books and other incentives and organize mid day meals.

this country. It may be worthwhile to explore the idea of the 'school complex' proposed by the Commission but extend its scope and possibilities. It will be important to envision institutional linkages that would revitalize government elementary schools improving school quality with specific focus on the educational needs of marginal groups. Thus the building of linkages between schools, academic support structures, institutions of teacher education as well as colleges and universities within a geographical area as well as with VECs/PRI and community level organizations will help 'break the terrible isolation under which the school functions...', mobilize the necessary expertise to build capacity of academic support structures, encourage research to provide feed back in relation to specific contexts of teaching and learning and as the Commission says 'make cooperative efforts to improve standards' (quotes are from Kothari, 1971).

Conclusion

In the foregoing discussion I have placed the education of dalits within the larger educational and policy context in India. Dalits are increasingly enrolling their children in schools, reflecting the growing value that they place on education for the future of their children. However irregular attendance in schools, relatively low middle school completion rates, and poor performance of children from these social groups presents a disturbing picture in relation to the fundamental right to education. I have attempted to show that caste status and poverty continue to constrain access to and participation in schools for a large section of the dalit population. There are social disparities in education across castes, particularly when dalits are compared to higher castes. Within dalit communities also, indicators of school participation vary across region, class, sub-caste and gender. Dalit girls in rural areas in the more educationally backward states are most at risk where UEE is concerned.

A major emphasis of the paper has been on the increasingly differentiated and stratified structure of educational institutions even within the elementary stage where education is deemed a fundamental right. I have shown that elite class, overlapping with entrenched higher caste interests, rather than the value of universal and equitable entitlement to a public good, continues to govern the school system. Exclusionary rules and practices come into play within educational institutions leading to inequitable

inclusion of dalit and marginal groups in schools. A section of dalits, the middle class, which has availed of the benefits of affirmative action, enjoys relatively more 'privileged inclusion' in schools. However for the vast majority of dalit children, low ranked caste status (compounded by poverty) continues to pervade school processes often through more 'secular' ways and influences the quality of schooling they receive, raising the larger issue of whether equity is really a commitment of state and society.

The experience of dalits in states where school attendance rates are high such as Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and Tamilnadu points to diverse factors that have encouraged the spread of education. These include effective policy interventions, expanding economic opportunities, functioning schools, public participation and community organisation for educational advancement. There is today a network of resource centres and village/school level committees across the country that aim to provide academic support to schools and encourage public participation in their functioning. I suggest that this institutional network provides the space to create enabling learning environments for the education of marginal groups. However, there is need to seriously reflect on how these institutions can be 'built' in order to embody principles and norms that facilitate the education of the most deprived, and engage their trust and confidence. In the absence of enabling and effective institutional supports, even ensuring universal school entry is unlikely leave alone universal completion of primary or middle schooling.¹¹ There is hence need to critically review structures in education, analyse and address constraints and bottlenecks, evolve linkages between institutions and set in place mechanisms that can energize institutional functioning and ensure accountability.

For dalits, education is a crucial resource to better their life chances as well as for social and political mobilization. Given the larger landscape of increasing market relations in education, and the shrinking of the public sector, which hitherto provided the main avenue for educational and social mobility for dalits, it is essential that equitable elementary education, under Article 21 A of the Constitution, is seen as providing a critical base that will enable dalits to expand their choices and opportunities for further education and occupation mobility, public participation and mobilization for change.

TABLE - 1
 Percentage of the Household Population Age 6-17 years Attending School by
 Gender, Residence and Social Group in India - 1998-99

DALII	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
6-10	79.5	83.6	75.1	77.3	82.0	72.3	86.6	88.6	84
11-14	71.0	78.4	62.9	67.4	76.6	57.4	78.1	83.3	72
6-14	76.1	81.5	70.2	73.4	79.9	66.5	82.8	86.2	79.0
15-17	45.8	55.2	35.8	41.3	52.1	29.9	57.4	63.2	51.
OC									
6-10	89.6	91.8	87.2	87.5	90.5	84.2	93.3	94.0	92.
11-14	84.3	88.3	80.0	80.8	86.8	74.4	89.8	90.5	89
6-14	87.3	90.3	84.1	84.7	89.0	80.1	91.8	92.4	91.0
15-17	63.0	69.6	56.3	56.1	67.2	45.2	73.6	73.0	74.2
ALL									
6-10	83.6	86.7	80.3	80.7	84.6	76.6	91.3	92.4	90.1
11-14	77.1	82.7	71.2	73.2	80.7	65.4	86.2	87.3	84.0
6-14	80.9	85.0	76.5	77.7	83.0	72.1	89.0	90.1	87.8
15-17	54.3	61.8	46.6	48.6	58.8	38.3	66.7	68.2	65.6

Source: *National Family Health Survey-2 (NFHS) (2000)*

Table -2
Percentage of the Household Population Age 6-17 years Attending School by
Gender, Standard of Living Index and Social Group in India – 1998-99

DALIT	Total			Rural			Urban		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
<i>SLI-1</i>									
6-10	69.3	75.3	63.0	68.9	74.9	62.5	72.5	78.1	66.7
11-14	57.4	68.3	45.2	56.7	68.2	44.1	62.2	68.9	53.2
6-14	64.8	72.6	56.3	64.3	72.4	55.6	68.4	74.2	61.8
15-17	29.7	39.4	18.3	29.6	39.8	17.7	30.2	36.7	22.7
<i>SLI-2</i>									
6-10	87.5	90.2	84.5	86.6	90.0	82.9	89.7	90.8	88.6
11-14	78.4	84.0	72.2	76.9	83.7	69.3	81.8	84.7	78.7
6-14	83.7	87.6	79.4	82.6	87.4	77.4	86.2	88.1	84.2
15-17	51.2	61.7	40.5	49.1	61.0	37.0	55.8	63.3	48.0
<i>SLI-3</i>									
6-10	87.5	90.2	84.5	86.6	90.0	82.9	89.7	90.8	88.6
11-14	78.4	84.0	72.2	76.9	83.7	69.3	81.8	84.7	78.7
6-14	83.7	87.6	79.4	82.6	87.4	77.4	86.2	88.1	84.2
15-17	51.2	61.7	40.5	49.1	61.0	37.0	55.8	63.3	48.0
OC									
<i>SLI-1</i>									
6-10	75.1	79.4	70.3	75.2	80.0	70.0	74.4	76.1	72.2
11-14	62.4	68.9	55.7	62.9	70.4	55.4	59.2	60.2	57.8
6-14	70.2	75.5	64.6	70.5	76.4	64.2	68.7	70.2	66.8
15-17	31.8	38.7	25.0	31.7	40.3	23.4	32.5	29.9	35.4
<i>SLI-2</i>									
6-10	89.8	92.2	87.3	89.6	92.7	86.3	90.4	91.2	89.6
11-14	82.7	88.3	76.7	82.0	89.6	74.1	84.1	85.6	82.5
6-14	86.8	90.6	82.8	86.4	91.4	81.1	87.7	88.8	86.6
15-17	56.0	65.3	46.3	55.1	68.8	41.4	58.0	58.0	58.0
<i>SLI-3</i>									
6-10	97.6	98.2	96.9	96.9	97.6	96.2	98.0	98.6	97.4
11-14	95.6	96.3	94.9	94.2	95.7	92.8	96.6	96.8	96.3
6-14	96.7	97.3	96.0	95.7	96.7	94.6	97.3	97.7	96.9
15-17	83.2	85.8	80.5	76.9	83.8	70.2	87.5	87.2	87.8

• SLI - standard of living index -- 1-3: lowest to highest; Source: NFHS (2000).

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Educate girls, prepare them for life

by
Karuna Chanana



Educate girls, prepare them for life?¹

Karuna Chanana²

Introduction

The central premise of this paper is that the exclusion of girls from elementary education or all of education will continue so long as schools are sites for the maintenance of gender identity and inequality with the active support of educational policies and programmes. Further, the Indian educational policies designed for the promotion of education of girls and women are not expected to be change agents. Moreover, that in spite of the insights and understanding gained from the women's movement, an overall framework which will encompass all the children, girls as well as boys, has not emerged. This narrow conceptualisation has not helped in bridging the gender gap and in providing the right to elementary education to Indian girls. Therefore, while looking at the elementary education and issues of exclusion and discrimination one has to look not only at access, which includes enrolment, dropout and retention but also at the conceptual framework underlying the Indian educational policies and programmes which are characterised by a discourse of inclusion and exclusion (Gale and Densmore 2000). The emphasis is on analysing educational policy to demonstrate how it "gendered social relations" (Lesley and Watson 1999:1).

It is an attempt to put together some of the key points that I have been making in my published papers, namely, that the emphasis on the instrumental value of education in the context of girls denies them agency; that even the most informed educational policy adopts a compartmentalised approach in which women are assigned a chapter along with separate chapters to others from the disadvantaged sections of society; that the educational policy constructs and integrates the social roles of women; and further that there is hardly any policy analysis from a gendered perspective. Therefore, a great deal has to be done before the right of women to education in India becomes a reality and the process of exclusion and discrimination can come to an end. However, education itself may be perceived as

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² Professor of sociology of education, Zakir Husain Centre For Educational Studies, School of Social Science-II, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi-110067.

being an end or as a means. Therefore, the questions that need to be asked are: Why are women given education? How is the need for their education conceptualised - historically and contemporaneously?

Four views emerge regarding the need and justification for women's education during the pre-and post-independence period. The first view which was salient in the pre-independence period was that reform in the social position of women (and education was an important instrument) would reform society. Therefore, the demand for women's education arose as a concomitant of social reform movement (Chanaana 1988). These considerations impacted on the curriculum for girls which are discussed later in this paper.

The second view or conception is based on the premise that men and women are equal and, therefore, equality is to be provided to women. Discrimination on the basis of race, caste or sex is to be eliminated. This view was incorporated in our Constitution.

The third conception of women's education emphasizes the need to develop all human resources (men as well as women) for the development of a society. Thus, the development of society is dependent on women and men and any view of 'development' must not omit them. It is argued that the lacuna so far in the development oriented programmes has been the focus only on men to the exclusion of women and that education is a necessary precondition for the development of all human resources and for equality.

Moreover, in recent times, gender as a principle underlying distribution of resources and entitlements within the household and the society, namely, education, economic rights, health care, and political participation, has become crucial in educational discourse due to the linkages of education with indicators of social development. In this discourse, education is viewed as an important resource to which, historically, women have been denied access.

This discourse on the education of girls assigns a utilitarian function to female literacy and education (Trevor and Densmore 2000: 9). For example, female literacy and education is socially desirable because it leads to reduction in maternal and child mortality, increases female literacy and education, and is good for the general well-being of the family. The assumptions underlying this position are twofold. First, women lack what education is expected to give them, that is, they lack the information and knowledge to reduce/plan childbirth, to increase child survival rate, etc. In other words, the role of female literacy in social development is emphasised. It also assumes that planning a family, ensuring good health and

child survival is the responsibility of women as mothers. The men/males have been absent in this discourse¹.

Development, thus, has had a dynamic definition changing from GNP as its main indicator to human development, with gender development now constituting important dimensions of societal development. What emerges in the debate on development is the pre-eminence of the instrumental value of education and the need to bring women into the educational stream so that society benefits from their education.

The fourth and the most recent conception underscores equality and empowerment of women as the aims of education which was articulated in the NPE 1986. It is now generally accepted that education, as a source of equality and empowerment, both at the individual and at the collective level, is imperative for women, who constitute half of humankind, if societies have to develop in any meaningful way. For the first time, there was a shift from the means to the ends perspective at the policy level. However, inspite of this shift the policy has been criticised for reinforcing patriarchy and is discussed later.

However, none of these conceptions question the existing structure of social relations and social roles of men and women or visualise the use of education as a tool to transcend the social division of labour within the schools and the society. Moreover, there are no debates around the education of boys. The exclusion of boys from the discourse on education for girls indicates an assumption that the goals of education for boys can be assumed and taken for granted. Is it because education is a means for girls and an end for boys?

Female sexuality and exclusion of girls from education

Although declarations have been made by the Government of India, time and again, that elementary education is a right yet there is a gap between promise and practice. Because rights can be granted in theory and laws can be set in place to spearhead change but the social reality takes longer to change. Therefore, the exclusion and inclusion of girls from schooling has to be seen and understood keeping this in view.

The concern with protection of female sexuality and the attendant notions of female purity/impurity and its links to caste status and the honour of the agnatic kin-group and familial consideration put severe constraints on the schooling of girls and women. This has to be seen alongwith the practice of female seclusion or parda and segregation especially around puberty to control female sexuality (Papanek and Minault 1982; Ahmad 1985: 16-19; Minault 1981: 87-88). Formal education or schooling involves moving into public spaces, interaction with males (in co-educational schools and with men teachers); or being socialized (through the

curriculum) as boys; and supposedly moving away from the eventual goal of wifehood and motherhood (Chanana 2001: 38; Chanana 1993:87; Singh 1985:11).

The familial and societal concern with protection of female sexuality accounts for whether girls have access to education or not. It also determines the quality, type and duration of education they receive and what they do with it later i.e. whether they work or not and what kind of jobs they take up, whether they work to earn before or after marriage. Further, that adaptations to changing situations are basically adjustments which do not call for social structural changes or changes in the sex role stereotypes or question the basic premises of the value system surrounding female sexuality.

Therefore, it is critical to have an understanding of the nature and functioning of familial socialisation as the process of gender construction and its impact on the education of the girl child. Socialisation and formal schooling or education, interact and react with each other. Both are processes of social control and train the individual to conform to the expectations of the social group. Although the family is the site of primary socialisation, the schools which are the sites of secondary socialisation, only reproduce primary socialisation. Protection of female sexuality and her purity are central to the socialisation of the female child and socialisation practices and their different significance for boys and girls are crucial to uncover the constraints imposed on girls' and women's education (Chanana 2001:38). If this is the social context, then do the latest official instruments transcend these constraints?

The present context

Several developments in the recent past have brought 'primary education' to the centre stage. For instance, the introduction of economic liberalisation in 1991 pitted primary education against higher education. Since then it has become an accepted part of the public discourse on education. It is integral to the official discourse and is reflected in the policies, programmes and funding pattern of higher education. It is also being promoted by the non-governmental organisations of all sorts, national and international. In fact, the international agencies are competing with one another for a share of the cake in the field of primary education. Three implications of this stance deserve serious consideration.

The first is the use of external funds in primary education from the early nineties. This was a departure from the post independence policy of the government of India and reflected a dilution of the state's responsibility to universalise elementary education.

The second relates to the reduction of the constitutional goal of providing free and compulsory education from eight years to five years of primary education (Chanana

and Rao 1999: 445; Sadgopal 2004: 60). The World Bank provided the soft loan to promote primary education under the highly publicised District Primary Education Programme. The Indian government willingly accepted this dilution and became an active partner of the international funding agencies and their agenda. According to Sadgopal, it was not only a matter of primary education of five years instead of eight years of elementary education but "the state is rapidly abdicating its constitutional obligations towards the provision of elementary education of equitable quality for all children" (2004: 60).

Third, higher education is pitted against primary education as if they were two isolated parts of the system. The holistic view of education was given up for a fractured view thereby defusing the focus from the larger philosophical and pedagogical goals of education. If primary education provides the roots of higher education, the latter provides support through the development of curriculum, pedagogy, and training of teachers, etc.

In addition, three new instruments have been made available by the government which raise hopes of those interested in education to rethink elementary schooling and its impact on girls. The first relates to the 73rd and 74th amendments of the Constitution which decentralised schooling and brought it within the purview of the local self government or Panchayati Raj. The second is the 86th amendment Bill 2002 which makes education a fundamental right of children between 6-14 years of age. The third is the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, launched at the end of the IXth five-year plan, a programme which promises to universalise elementary education for all the children between 6-14 years of age throughout the country. At this juncture, reflection and rethinking are critical and all the more necessary given the continued problem of non enrolment, dropout, poor quality of schooling, coupled with the marginalisation of girls especially those from the Scheduled Castes, Tribes, and rural areas.

It is by now a well-known fact that the gender gap at all levels of education has been persistent for the last five and a half decades of our independence. Even though statistics show that this gender gap has decreased, it is also true that it is nowhere nearing closing. In other words, the enrolment of girls continues to be lower than that of the boys. Further, the dropout rate among girls is higher which impacts on the retention rate. Additionally, three fourths of the out-of-school children (33 million out of 44 million) are girls (India 2001: 42). A majority of them belong to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, minorities, and from rural and inaccessible areas, etc. Moreover, poverty affects girls more than the boys (Filmer and Pritchett 1999). Nevertheless, the social, regional and economic diversity of India has also to be taken note of while one is looking at the gender dimension of elementary education.

For example, specific states have been identified as being very backward in education generally and in the education of girls specifically.¹⁰ There is enough data to show that a sizeable proportion of out-of-school dropouts, working children, non enrolled children, children of migrants and the poor, and the disabled are girls (2001: 42). These trends are reflected in whichever way one presents the statistics, that is, whether one is looking at gross enrolment rate or net enrolment rate or at the completion rate. It is also true that while caste, tribe, and economic factors, etc. keep girls from specific social groups out of the schools, the socio cultural factors keep all the girls out. The socio-cultural factors cut across class, caste, tribe, rurality etc. (Chamana 2001)

Is the conceptual framework underlying most of the policy instruments, although informed with this understanding, able to transcend the constraints imposed by social reality? If not, how then can education be an instrument of social change in the lives of girls and women? These considerations have impacted on the formulation of the policies, for example, what subjects to teach or not to teach girls in schools-a concern that has been there ever since formal education was introduced for girls in colonial India.

Elementary Education: Policy Initiatives

Curriculum content and its relevance for the social role of girls has been a salient issue since the late 19th century. For example, the Indian Education Commission (1882-83) dealt extensively with female education and made several recommendations. Even as early as that there was awareness that girls may not attend full day schools, that incentives such as scholarships and waiver of tuition fees had to be provided; that female teachers were needed to attract girl students to the schools and the schools had to be situated in suitable localities. So far as the curriculum and teaching were concerned, "the standard of instruction for primary girls' schools be... drawn up with special reference to the requirements of home life, and to the occupations open to women,... that the greatest care be exercised in the selection of suitable textbooks for girls' schools...." (Garg 2001: 233). The Educational Policy 1904 mentions the social customs of the people which act as barriers to female education. In spite of this, the government supports it through scholarships and fees because "far greater proportional impulse is imparted to the educational and moral tone of the people than by the education of men" (Garg 2001: 257). The educational Policy 1913 continues in the same vein. Although it notes that social customs differ in different parts of India, it recommends that, "the education of girls should be practical with reference to the position which they will fill in social life. It should not seek to imitate the education suitable for boys..." (Garg 2001: 289)

This kind of argument continues throughout the colonial period with a few exceptions. It was argued by social reformers and 'enlightened' Indians that schools should offer relevant curriculum and subjects to the girls. In the colonial period the majority view was that the school curriculum should be different for girls and boys. It should meet the special needs of the girls (Chana 1988). Here the emphasis was on the social role of women. Arguments were given that even though men and women may be emotionally and intellectually similar, psychologically and physically they were different (Siquiera 1939: 129; Chiplunkar 1930: 232). However, there were some exceptions to the majority view. For example, Choksi (1929: 68, 72) and Menon (1944:17) argued that the primary function of education should be to inculcate critical thinking, particularly at the university stage. According to Choksi

"it is doubtful whether a university can so circumscribe cultural aims as to propose and equip women as housekeepers, wives or even mothers. Its great aim should finally be to produce accurate, far reaching and critical thought (1929: 65)."

Menon, far more radical than Choksi, mentioned that the clamour for a change in curriculum came mainly from men. She also emphasized the need for intellectual training and suggested that mathematics, physics, and social sciences should not be excluded from girls' curricula even though certain subjects meant only for them might also be included.

Hannah Sen and Hansa Mehta took a middle position. They agreed that the curriculum for girls had to be related to life and home and, therefore, domestic science should be part of the curricula. However, Sen also said that,

It seems paradoxical that, while the progress of higher education has reduced the inevitability of marriage as the only career for women, greater stress is being laid on the study of domestic subjects. The present attitude is but a reaffirmation of the age-old principle that, whether women marry or follow other pursuits, on them will devolve the main task of managing the home, at least for decades to come (Sen 1938: 100-1).

Mehta favoured a broad based curriculum which would include what was offered in the general curriculum alongwith the subjects meant for girls so that girls could make a choice. In other words, even if a woman's social role is highlighted, school and home were not perceived as incompatible.

The post-independence period is also not free of these concerns because political freedom did not bring with it an overnight change in the sex roles and the expectations from formal education. Nonetheless, the resolve to universalise

elementary education was incorporated in the Constitution. There was also the awareness that the Indian society is far too complex and heterogeneous for a uniform programme. This framework was reflected in the Indian Constitution in which "minorities needed to be brought into the mainstream, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes required social justice and equality. Women, on the other hand, deserved equality. Thus, Constitutional provisions were made to achieve these aims, specially, those relating to the first two categories" (Chana 1993: 69). "The major concern about the minorities and the Scheduled Castes/Tribes relates to the fulfilment of Constitutional provisions. Women have neither enjoyed similar concern nor legal backup. Subsequently, the policymakers looked at the three social categories in isolation of one another instead of treating equality as the overarching parameter and looking at girls within all the social categories. As a result of the fragmented approach, subsequent policies have lacked an overall conceptual framework.

However, there has been much better articulation of the aims of education for women as a result of the women's movement during the last 15 years." (Chana 1993: 86). As a result of this, NPE 1986 articulated the goals of education for girls and women as equality and empowerment.

"education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women. In order to neutralise the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be well-conceived edge in favour of women. The National Education System will play a positive, interventionist role in the empowerment of women. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, the training and orientation of teachers, decision-makers and administrators, and the active involvement of educational institutions. This will be an act of faith and social engineering.... The removal of women's illiteracy and of obstacles inhibiting their access to, and retention in, elementary education will receive overriding priority...." (6)

It was an improvement on the earlier policy documents and government instruments in that it brought together the insights and understanding gained from research and action by the women's movement. Therefore, equality and empowerment were well thought out and debated upon before they were incorporated in NPE 1986. For once the focus was on the women themselves and not on their instrumentality. This reflected a marked improvement in articulating the goals of education for girls but unfortunately over a period of time one no longer sees that emphasis on education as an end, by itself and for itself, in the context of women.ⁱⁱⁱ It is another matter that the policy diluted this goal through some other provisions, for example, the

introduction of an alternative to formal education (non formal education) for girls, which will be discussed later.

Programme of Education (POA) 1992 continues the thrust of the National policy on education 1986. It states,

"Education for Women's Equality is a vital component of the overall strategy of securing equity and social justice in education.... what comes out clearly is the need for all to implement and institutional mechanisms to ensure that greater sensitivity is reflected in the implementation of educational programmes across-the-board.... it should be incumbent on all actors, agencies and institutions in the field of education at all levels to be gender sensitive and ensure that women have their rightful share in all educational programmes and activities" (1).

It devotes the first chapter to education for women's equality followed by a chapter each on the education of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Sections, minorities, handicapped, etc. It focuses on the role of education in changing the status of women but stops short of presenting a conceptual framework for this purpose. In continuation of the programmes and strategies of NPE 1986 it limits itself to suggesting ad hoc and piecemeal strategies, such as, opening boarding schools and alternative schools and ECCE centres, setting up alternative schools, thereby accepting the sex role stereotypes about girls. According to Sadgopal, the Indian government has willingly surrendered to the international agenda.^{iv}

"Significantly, the Jomtien-Dakar Framework does not even refer to patriarchy as an issue and essentially reduces girls' education to merely enrolling them on school registers and giving them literacy skills. This is exactly what happened when World Bank-sponsored DPEP adopted Mahila Samakhya.... it became a mere girl child enrolment programme.... Unfortunately, the notion of gender parity (ratio of enrolment of girls and boys) in UNESCO's EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/04 reinforces this confusion. Also, the World Bank diluted the goal of women's education to just raising their literacy levels and productivity (rather than educating or empowering them).... The Dakar framework has now added ambiguous notion of Life Skills that seems to be yet another mechanism for social manipulation and market control of the adolescent mindset, particularly the girls. (2004: 27).

Research and action have provided enough feedback to understand that there is need to identify girls in all the groups, namely, among the minorities, the disabled, the urban deprived, those living in isolated areas, among certain castes and tribes

and among the working children. (India 2001: 6). However, the educational policy documents continue to use a compartmentalised approach to education. For example, a separate chapter is generally written on the education of girls, and others on the education of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, another on children with disability, one on child labour, the urban disadvantaged, etc. Each of these chapters may not refer to gender. In other words, gender may be excluded from the social groups based on caste, tribe, disability and working status of the children. These then become exclusive categories and not inclusive as they are expected to be. As new groups are identified, such as the working children or children with disability, gender is not necessarily included. There is a considerable time lag between the identification of a new parameter (such as disability, working status) and its incorporation in the policy documents. Even then the integration remains at best fragmentary or compartmentalised.

This approach has led to another anomaly. Even the most well worked out policy documents mention separate strategies for improving the enrolment and retention of girls and children from other social groups and categories. For example, the National Policy on Education 1986, devotes a section to the role of education in promoting equality. It underscores the twin dimensions of education, namely, the removal of disparities and equalisation of educational opportunities. Strategies are outlined separately for women, the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and minorities. However, their specific needs and suggested strategies are neither integrated nor in an overall comprehensive framework provided for the education of all the disadvantaged groups." (Chana 1993: 86) This happens even when the problem is of a general nature, e.g., out-of-school children (because they dropped out or never-enrolled) who have to be given education. For example, the non-formal education for the children of 9 to 14 age group was meant mainly for the girls who were out-of-school. It was to be provided for two to three hours in the evening so that the young girls could provide assistance in domestic chores (Chana 1996: 374) and sibling care during the day. The implications are that the social roles of girls need not change, and their poor parents need not be given proper employment and wages. Instead, a parallel and alternative system of education with lesser financial, human and pedagogical inputs, such as the non-formal system will provide equality in terms of access/enrolment and quality of education. In other words, education is viewed as an instrument of reinforcing the traditional sex role division. "This implied the willingness of the policymakers to adjust with, rather than challenge, the gender stereotypes of the role of girls in domestic chores and sibling care. In this sense, NPE 1986 legitimised both child labour and patriarchy (Sadgopal 2004: 11).

The 10th plan document on elementary education (2001:7) is critical of earlier programmes, which were "disjointed in nature" because their targets were either specific regions or merely covered specific aspects of elementary education or did not cover the whole country. It is proposed in the Xth Plan "to have a holistic and convergent approach." It mentions a two-pronged approach which will mainstream gender and also introduce specific schemes for the promotion of the education of girls and women. For example, it is mentioned that all the programmes will continue even though educationists have criticised them, notably DPEP, for reinforcing gender differences and patriarchy (Sadgopal 2004:6). When specific schemes are mentioned such as the National Programme for Education of Girls at the Elementary Level, NPEGEL, the fragmentary approach is very evident although there is also recognition that girls are the most disadvantaged in all the identified social groups.

SSA aims to universalise elementary education for the 16-14 age group by the year 2010. The purpose is to bridge the social, regional and gender gaps. Community participation is central to the program. One section is devoted to the coverage of special focus groups. The first one is on the education of girls. Like the Xth Plan paper it also mentions that the emphasis will be on "mainstreaming gender concerns in all the activities under the SSA programme.... Every activity under the programme will be adjudged in terms of its gender component." (n.d., 40) It also mentions that girls from among out of school children, especially girls from the disadvantaged groups, have to be taken back to school. There is also mention of local contexts. But then, almost in continuation, one also reads "relating education to their life." Is it not going back to the old paradigm?

A notable refrain in the policy documents is that the education of girls should be relevant and should prepare them for life (India 2001). Nowhere is it mentioned that education should prepare boys for life. What should one infer from this differentiation in policy perspective? Is it not obvious that while there is need for differentiation at the implementation level, there is need to have a common conceptual framework.

In addition, one has to look at the bifurcation of the elementary education into primary and upper primary schools (Nayar 2002). This institutional arrangement assumed, right after the independence of the country, that every child who is able to access primary schooling will not be able to or will not be interested in completing the upper primary grades. How else to explain the acceptance of different norms for the primary school and for the upper primary schools and also the fact that grades one to eight were not taught in one school. While the primary school had to be set up within a distance of one kilometre of the village, the upper primary school was

to be set up with a distance of three kilometres. Thus, children who could not walk up to three kilometres were automatically excluded from upper primary schooling. This was in spite of the fact that the Constitution promised free and compulsory schooling for the first eight years. Were these norms not in violation of the constitutional promise of universal education? If the children cannot physically access the upper primary schools how does one ensure universal elementary education? The Xth Plan also mentions that the primary schools are to be upgraded to upper primary schools if norms permit (2001:44). My question is: why not change the norms?

Moreover, there is the problem of social access which is pertinent in the case of young girls who are not allowed to go to school which are not at a safe distance from their homes^v. This has been known for a pretty long time to the policy makers, the educational administrators and the government yet till date primary schools are not upgraded to upper primary schools. In fact, if education in the rural areas has to be made accessible up to the elementary level, a new thinking has to go into it.

Wrap Up

The persistent gender gap in education indicates that the policies have not been implemented realistically. It is also not enough to formulate policies and programmes or to enact laws because even the best ones may not be implemented. Compulsory elementary education is a very good example. Again, even the official stance of positive discrimination in favour of the SCs and STs does not benefit their women (Chanaana 1993). Again, there is discrimination at the implementation stage when young girls receive fewer and lesser benefits from various schemes, and when the state and the households spend less on their education or when the parents do not send them to schools because they provide domestic help (Chanaana 1996).

In addition, the large number of out-of-school girls are a symptom of systemic failure and of the state's inability to provide this basic human right to the girls. Again, socio cultural biases and the emphasis on domestic role are almost universal, yet their combination with poverty has an extremely detrimental effect on the participation of girls in education.

The impact of privatisation, due to economic liberalisation and globalisation, of education, is expected to be adverse. There are more unaided expensive private secondary schools than the government schools in Delhi. There is enough information to substantiate the point that parents spend less on their school going daughters than on the sons and they prefer to send the sons to the private schools and the daughters to the government schools. Although macro statistics and yet to

be put together it is a foregone conclusion that the girls are more likely to be excluded from this kind of education. Further, the impact of the market forces in determining the choice of subjects and future options will also discriminate against girls. Sadgopal has this to say about globalisation and the international agenda on India's education, "Women will be turned into a marketable commodity, thereby further strengthening the patriarchal stranglehold. Girls' education will be aimed at turning them into mere transmitters of fertility control, health or nutritional messages and making them "efficient" producers for the global economy; their right to education and development as a human will be further marginalised. (Sadgopal 2004: 60)

As stated earlier, socialisation of girls and the gender-based division of labour determine whether girls will be sent to school, for how long and why. In other words, gender ideology underlies the societal perceptions of the goals of women's education. Therefore, the parameters of educational policy which delimit women's role as well as the functions of formal education need critical examination because they continue to affect the approach and programmes relating to elementary education of girls.

"Gender operates in a manner so that women are at the bottom of all the groups. Thus, gender becomes an all-encompassing negative parameter conferring cumulative and competing disadvantages on women in their race for equality (as women), for social justice (as Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe women) and for mainstreaming (as minority women).... While the constitutional safeguards reflect the hierarchical and fragmented social reality, the educational policy and programmes are unable to take this into account. They are also unable to perceive the disjunction among the sectoral aims of education. It is also problematic to "mainstream" one section, provide social justice to another and equality to those who are members of all sections of society." (Chanana 1993:90) To reiterate:

"Educational policies and programmes are rooted in social values and premises. Even when they are made gender inclusive, they are constantly subverted by the gendered vision of parents, administrators, policy makers, and teachers who are the custodians of formal education. Thus, the process of subversion continues unhindered.¹¹ This subversion may be conscious and explicit or indirect and implicit but it is fine tuned to familial and societal expectations, socialisation and sex role stereotypes. It is possible to move along with every stage of the life cycle of a girl through school and college to highlight the concerns around female sexuality and female body that colour and determine the options available to her and the options she makes. Thus, schooling of girls is essentially embedded in the societal context even though

it provides an expanded space for growth to women. It ensures that women remain passive actors in the process of schooling, do not question the patrifocal ideology and do not transgress the social boundaries and work within the accepted system of values. In fact, schools and schooling become active instruments of cultural reproduction and social control..." (Chanaana 2001: 57).

The educational discourse emerging from the development and modernisation paradigm imbues education with the powers of engineering societal change at the collective level. Within this paradigm, the individual who experiences mobility and attitudinal change through education assumes the role of the change agent. This model assumes a positive relationship between formal education, occupational mobility and change. Formal education bestows necessary skills for the market and also the 'modern' attitudes suited for a changing society while school is the site of transformation of individuals. It is ironical that this is not expected from girls, education. They are denied agency because the goals of familial socialisation and schooling as processes have to converge. Thus, they continue to remain the objects, not the subjects, of social policy

We do not learn from our experience because programmes which excluded men, such as the family planning programme, and those that excluded women, such as the community development programme, failed to achieve their goals and have been critically evaluated for this lacuna. While differences between women and men are to be recognised, one has to be conscious "that a reductive notion of femininity has underpinned many of the exclusions women face; and in arguing that some attributes are inherently feminine we find ourselves on weak ground when arguing that others are not. Gender is either a social construct or is not a social construct," (Lesley and Watson 1999: 2).

Moreover, preparation for life, making education relevant, and imparting of life skills are very desirable goals of education but they should be meant for all the children who enter school system. It will also depend on how "relevance", "life skills" and "preparation for life" are defined. Lesley and Watson refer to the embeddedness of women's exclusion in some of the critical concepts in social policy discourse (1999:6). Therefore, the discourse of inclusion and exclusion has to be replaced with an inclusive discourse of difference (Gale and Densmore 2000:123).

We need policies to neutralise or circumvent the ideological, structural and familial impediments so that the educational facilities are fully utilised by the girls. However, even though there is an apparent shift in emphasis in educational policy from equal educational opportunity for men and women to education for women's

equality and empowerment, the instrumental value of education for women remains paramount. Sadgopal argues that exclusion and discrimination are inherent in the present operating education policy and instead of focusing on implementation, "attention must remain focused on analysis of the character of the policy itself." (2004:59) Rees contends that it is possible to integrate equality into all policies and programmes from the stage of formulation to implementation. What is needed is a paradigm shift (1999). According to Lesley and Watson, "There are many ways in which the... state both constructed and was underpinned by, delineated roles for women, mainstream social policy analysis remains sadly uninformed by questions of gender" (1999:1).

Is it not time that the debate on girls' education and the role of the state also begins to focus on girls themselves and also integrates it with that of the boys? In other words, common goals be identified for all the children and gender concerns be integrated in the overall policy? What is pertinent is that education should become an end for both the boys and girls. India faces the paradox of its commitment to promoting universal elementary education, and the large gender gap in the educational field. Therefore, it is also imperative to move from the means to ends perspective. In other words, education should be not only a means (instrumental value) for societal improvement but also for the sake of women as persons, for knowledge and for self.

- i Scholars and social activists have criticised the lack of focus on men in the family planning programmes. Socially and politically this makes sense. Socially because the well-being of the family in a patriarchal society may, at least, provide educational access to girls. Politically too, in the same vein and in a society, where gender overlaps the other parameters of poverty, caste, tribe and rurality, those in charge of education may at least push it forward to support family and society.
- ii The seven states in the northeastern region are socially culturally different from the rest of the country (Chana 1993). Some of the states have a majority population of the tribals. Here poverty does not impact gender differences adversely nor is the gender gap in literacy and education as wide as in the rest of India (Srivastav and Dubey 2002).
- iii Although the 10th plan document mentions self esteem and self-confidence of girls through education, it does not articulate it within any framework.
- iv The latest example is the India Education Report, which has chapters on all these groups. Except for the chapters on the dalit children and the tribal children gender is not identified as a parameter.
- v Economists have started using the economic jargon in explaining the problems in elementary education. For example, instead of identifying barriers to the universalisation of primary education the World Bank report talks of supply side factors which influence enrolment and attendance.
- vi For instance, when the feminists raised the issue of 'home science' being labelled as a feminine discipline, they were arguing for a broader framework and for making it gender neutral. But several elite private co-educational schools in Delhi discontinued this subject thereby closing the option of a career (as home science school teachers) to women. Perhaps, considerations of cost went into this myopic decision because home science entails setting up laboratories. It also meant saving on teacher salary.

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